COMMEMORATING THE IRISH FAMINE

MEMORY AND THE MONUMENT

EMILY MARK-FITZGERALD

REAPPRAISALS IN IRISH HISTORY

Commemorating the Irish Famine

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Memory and the Monument

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LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published 2013 by
Liverpool University Press
4 Cambridge Street
Liverpool
L69 7ZU

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication data
A British Library CIP record is available

ISBN 978-1-84631-898-6
Web PDF eISBN 978-1-78138-558-6

Typeset by Carnegie Book Production, Lancaster
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this book would not have been possible without the support of so many over the past decade.

I owe a tremendous debt to the many hundreds of committee members, artists and other individuals who so freely shared with me their knowledge, information and interest in the Famine's history and commemoration. Whether through correspondence, personal interview, hosting me in their communities, or through provision of records, details and anecdotes about their projects – in small rural villages across Ireland, and across the length and breadth of Australia, Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. – their enthusiasm and generosity has been extraordinary, and I am deeply grateful for their participation and interest in my work. They are too numerous to list in their entirety, but particular thanks to the membership of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, whose many chapters facilitated my work (and to Michael Cummings and Phil Gilson for their assistance in tapping into the AOH's national network); membership of the Irish Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick; Action from Ireland and Concern; and Avril Doyle, former Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee. Special thanks for their overseas hospitality are owed to Tom Power (Sydney) and Val Noone (Melbourne); Harold Wright (Saint John), Tony O'Loughlin (Kingston), Robert Kearns (Toronto), Sylvie Gauthier (Montreal); John Walsh (Olean), Laurence Shine (Buffalo), Rob Hughes and Jack Sullivan (Keansburg), James Gill (New York City), John Donovan (Philadelphia); Greg Quiery and Frank McIver (Liverpool), Fr. Eamon Sweeney (Carfin). It was not possible to include details on all projects surveyed as part of this work, but I hope their inclusion in the Appendix and the further details supplied on the accompanying project website (www.irishfaminememorials.com) will lead others to recognize the contributions these groups have made to supporting local Irish history.

The insights and information provided by so many visual artists has been central to this research: my thanks especially to Brian Tolle, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh, Glenna Goodacre, John Behan, Robert Shure, Rowan

Gillespie, Carolyn Mulholland, Kenneth Thompson and the late Eamonn O'Doherty for their participation and time spent discussing their work.

My gratitude also for the research assistance provided by the library staff at University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the National Library of Ireland, Cork City Archives, the National Irish Visual Arts Archive, National Folklore Archive and the Office of Public Works; the State Libraries of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia; St Mary's University in Halifax, Concordia University in Montreal; the Watts Gallery, the British Library and University of Liverpool; NYU Glucksman House and Quinnipiac University; and many other small local libraries, historical societies and archives located across Ireland, the U.K., Australia, the U.S., and Canada. I am further grateful for insights on specialist topics provided by Anne Fuchs, Dorothy Kelly, Patricia MacDonald, Catherine Marshall, Mark McGowan, Jonathan McCormick, Mary McKenna and Diane Negra.

Most central to the realization of this book has been the unflagging support of Peter Gray, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Paula Murphy, Mary Daly, Niamh O'Sullivan and Ciarán Benson. My deep thanks are owed to them for their generous advice and guidance on my work and writing over many years, and for their continuing friendship; in addition I am grateful to Margaret Kelleher, Enda Delaney, Philip McEvansoneya, Cormac Ó Gráda, Fintan Cullen, and Joe Lee for also reviewing draft chapters and offering invaluable critiques. My thanks to my editor Alison Welsby at Liverpool University Press and the excellent and thoughtful reviewers who contributed immensely to this book's refinement. I am fortunate to be part of the wonderful staff (past and present) of UCD's School of Art History and Cultural Policy (Valerie Brouder, Elizabeth Varley, Carla Briggs, Anne Kelly, Pat Cooke, Nicola Figgis, Lynda Mulvin, John Loughman, Paula Murphy, Kathleen James-Chakraborty and Philip Cottrell), unfailing in their support and boundless camaraderie. I am especially grateful to Ciarán ÓGaora for allowing me to be part of his wonderful studio Zero-G during a key period of this work's development, to Trina Vargo of the US-Ireland Alliance for helping bring me to Ireland in the first place, and to all my former postgraduate colleagues at UCD's Humanities Institute of Ireland.

Financial support for this research and the extensive travel it entailed was provided by UCD's College of Arts & Celtic Studies and the Humanities Institute of Ireland; the Royal Hibernian Academy and Royal Irish Academy; US–Ireland Alliance (Mitchell Scholarship) and the Mellon-Mays Fellowship Programme. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, who funded the sabbatical year during which this book was finished, and to the National University of Ireland who also provided a publication subvention.

For their unwavering friendship, comments on drafts, cheerleading and

encouragement, my love and gratitude are due to Carole Holohan, Aimée Little, Deirdre Kelliher, Malcolm Sen, Katherine O'Callaghan, Mairín Ní Chellaigh (special thanks for her expert assistance with the many Irish translations), and especially Conor Lucey.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, most especially my mother and my sisters, and to the FitzGeralds for making me part of their own. This book is dedicated to the memory of my father Dennis Mark, for his enduring love and pride in me – and to Blaze O'Connor, whose life was, and is, an inspiration to all of her friends and family. And, most of all, to my husband Des FitzGerald – for his care of our two beautiful boys Myles and Gus, and patience with me throughout this long process – all my love and thanks for what has been, is, and will be.

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs of contemporary monuments are my own.

Early versions of some text have previously been published; my thanks to both reviewers and editors for their insights and thoughtful critiques, and to the publishers for their reproduction permission:

Mark, Emily. 'Pathos and Paddywhackery: Erskine Nicol and the Painting of the Irish Famine.' In *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds: More Cross-Currents in Irish and Scottish Studies*, edited by Shane Alcobia-Murphy, Johanna Archbold, John Gibney and Carole Jones. Belfast: University of Aberdeen/ Queen's University Belfast, 2005.

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Mark-FitzGerald, Emily. 'Towards a Famine Art History: Invention, Reception, and Repetition from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth.' In *Ireland's Great Hunger: Relief, Representation, and Remembrance*, edited by David Valone. Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2010.

Mark-FitzGerald, Emily. 'The Irish Famine and Commemorative Culture.' In *Holodomor and Gorta Mór: Histories, Memories and Representations of Famine in Ukraine and Ireland*, edited by Christian Noack, Lindsay Janssen, Vincent Comerford. London: Anthem Press, 2012.

1
Introduction

The events of 1845–52 in Ireland known as the 'Great Famine' constituted a cataclysm unequalled in Irish history. With more than a million dead from starvation and disease, and more than a million in exodus from Ireland to Britain, North America and Australia, today Ireland remains one of the only European nations whose population is smaller than during the nineteenth century. Precipitated by the potato blight, the Famine was exacerbated by a colonial administration whose failure to alleviate the crisis proved disastrous: the impact of the Famine devastated Irish culture, language, and social demographics, formed the basis for the massive Irish diaspora and paved the eventual road to revolution and Irish independence. And yet, for nearly 150 years any sense of a public or collective 'memory' of this period has proved elusive: ill-suited to the teleology of Irish nationalism, which posited the Easter Rising as the nation's supreme moment of self-realization, the horrors and shame associated with the Famine period relegated its representation to the margins of Irish history and remembrance.

What changed, then, in the mid-1990s, to occasion the remarkable outpouring of public commemoration and sentiment (described in the Irish media as 'Famine fever') that swept across Ireland and the nations of its diaspora during the Famine's 150th anniversary and reversed the trope of Famine 'silence'? How and why has the Famine moved from an 'unspeakable' event to perhaps the most visualized cultural experience of the Irish across the globe? This book seeks to chart the complex history of the Famine's place in visual representation and memory, mapped against its inexorable rise as a cultural reference point in Ireland and its diaspora since the 1990s: to explain why the Famine past has come to matter so much in our present, and how its commemorative visualizations reveal a conflicted struggle for local, national and diasporic ethnic self-definitions within the crowded global marketplace of memory and heritage.

Within the short space of two decades the number of permanent monuments to the Famine has risen from a small handful to more than one hundred. Ranging from simple community-led memorials to complex public

artworks valued in excess of US$5 million, the rapid monumentalization of the Famine in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia suggests the convergence of a renewed interest in Famine history with increasingly global paradigms of commemoration. The resurrection of a perceived shared 'memory' of the Famine is, however, the product of attempts to inscribe new socio-cultural values onto a catastrophic history whose deep imprint on Ireland and its diaspora resists simple signification.

The genesis and foundations of this book are based in fieldwork conducted since 2002, in the form of a global survey of commemorative Famine monuments and memorials constructed since 1990, supplemented by a critical examination of the visual lexicon of the Famine from the nineteenth century to the present.[1] The compiling of this record has involved site visits across Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, the U.S. and Australia; extensive archival work and documentation of commemorative projects; and interviews and contributions from hundreds of individuals and groups responsible for their funding, design, creation and construction. What has emerged is an extraordinary landscape of Famine memory, fuelled by a passionate embrace of the commemorative enterprise by a wide range of communities and constituencies. Monument and memory have combined to produce a contemporary visual culture of the Famine with roots in nineteenth-century representational practices, yet grounded within a complex ecology of academic, political and social discourses of Famine history and memory, contemporary agendas and the pragmatic 'business' of commemoration. The book examines processes of Famine monuments' conception, construction and reception – in local, national and global contexts, and at varying levels of 'community' and high profile memorialization. In charting the diverse social, political and aesthetic dimensions of contemporary Irish memory in the public sphere, it explores how collective and cultural public memory practices have contributed to the redefinition of a global ethnic community.

Visualizing the Famine victim or Irish migrant at these newly conceived sites of memory is, however, complicated by the oppositional forces of absence and presence that haunt the visual and representational history of the Famine and nineteenth-century Irish migration. As a history marked in the main by death, exile and dispersion, the Famine's re-emergence

1 This full visual and historical catalogue compiled by the author (including photographs, inscriptions and historical documentation) is available at www.irishfaminememorials.com. A summary list of recorded monuments is included in the Appendix. See also Emily Mark, 'Memorials and Monuments to the Irish Famine: Commemorative Art and History' (PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 2008).

into the resolutely material (and monumental) domain of public memory elicits a paradox of representation: how can this fractious yet immense social experience be apprehended at the site of commemoration? A striking contradiction of much Famine remembrance lies in its allegiance to the concerns and practices of contemporary commemoration (what Andreas Huyssen has described as the 'hypertrophy' of modern memory over history, and the increasing homogeneity of commemorative aesthetics in disparate geographical contexts[2]), an insistence on the Famine's 'unspeakability' and traumatic impact, and the persistent predilection (especially in the diaspora) towards a highly emotive and quintessentially Victorian visual iconography. The collision of public memory, fine art practice and popular taste may not always yield acclaimed works of art, but the choices made by commemorative groups illuminate the enduring appeal of the 'monumental' in spite of its rejection by much contemporary art practice and philosophy. They further demonstrate how ideologies associated with Irish ethnic cultural memory have become naturalized within refashioned commemorative forms.

As studies of the Irish past – and its presence in our present – have progressed beyond the reification of 'high' political and economic history, so too has Famine memory emerged as a historical and contemporary phenomenon warranting examination in its own right, even as its boundaries, content and modes of transmission remain contentious. What does the invocation of a 'collective', 'cultural' or 'social' memory of the Famine (whether by commemorationists or those studying their activity) imply? An intense focus on 'memory' as vehicle for expressing and analyzing public relationships to the past has characterized the vast international expansion of 'memory studies' (as discipline) and the 'memory boom' (as practice) since the 1980s and especially during the 1990s. Recent reassessments of the ascendancy of memory studies across disciplines recognize that both memory and its chronicling possess distinct (if overlapping) histories;[3] this is no less true for the evolution of Famine memory in Ireland and its diaspora. Whilst it is impossible to fully account for the complex biography of Famine memory in this brief introduction, it is nonetheless essential to situate

2 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995).

3 Some of the most useful of these critiques include Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method.' *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 December (1997): 1386–403; Kerwin Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse.' *Representations* 69, Winter (2000): 127–50; Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies.' *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 May (2002): 179–97; Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, 'Introduction.' In *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

recent scholarship within some of these debates on memory's epistemology, methodology, mediation/technology and currency.

In the early 1990s (predating the Famine commemorative boom) Donald Akenson delivered a prognostic warning of the passionate feelings and recourse to memory attached to the subject of the Irish Famine:

> One of the points at which the usually-flaccid sense of ethnic identity among the Irish in the English-speaking world becomes tauter is where the great nineteenth-century outflow from Ireland is memorialized and especially when the Great Famine and its flood of migration is depicted […] So keen are we to be told emotionally compelling stories from those catastrophic times, that we are apt to believe anything, provided it is sufficiently vivid […] The lesson here is clear: the hunger for knowledge about certain aspects of the Irish diaspora is so great that one must guard strenuously against credulity, especially when the information that comes to hand is so evocative, emotionally gripping, and fits with pre-existent stereotypes.[4]

Akenson's characterization of Famine memory as a popular (and emotionally charged) phenomenon intertwined with issues of narration, representation and identity, and subject to manipulation and distortion in its antagonism with history, pre-empted much academic and popular discourse on Famine memory's conflicted motives and manifestations. In its more emancipatory form, the study of Famine memory has been construed as a socially grounded, epistemic and methodological alternative to traditional 'unitary' Irish historical practices,[5] perhaps best epitomized by the revival of scholarship on Famine folklore. The work of Niall Ó Ciosáin and Cormac Ó Gráda has been particularly influential in this regard, seeking to recuperate 'forgotten' voices of the past, recalibrate the historical record and refute assumptions about the presence (or more accurately, absence) of Famine knowledges in community and individual narratives.[6] In their analyses and critiques of memory which address both historical and contemporary practices, each

4 Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto: P.D. Meany Company, 1993), 16.

5 Such distinctions owe much to Maurice Halbwach's conceptualization of collective memory: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182.

6 Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Was there "Silence" about the Famine?' *Irish Studies Review* 13 (1995): 7–10; Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine.' *Folklore* August (2000): 222–32; Cormac Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol: Bealoideas agus Amhrain* (Dublin: Coisceim, 1994); Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Famine,

has further argued against the widely held and expressed assumption that Famine memory lay dormant up until the 'recovery exercises' of the 1990s, and qualified the view that the Famine was a culturally cataclysmic event experienced equally across all segments of society.

Ó Ciosáin's articulation of a 'taxonomy of collective memory' – structuring folkloric narratives across categories of global, local and popular memory – has further underscored the fluidity and hybridity of Famine meaning and representation for subsequent generations, where

> between the localised and fragmentary on the one hand and the global and abstract on the other, there is a third level. This is a popular memory consisting of a stylised repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends, many of them part of a wider international narrative repertoire, which form a system of representation of famine and scarcity […][7]

Observations of how older forms of a 'popular' Famine memory have drawn from both local resources and wider 'meta-narratives' of cultural reference anticipate many of the more contemporary forms of Famine representations examined in this book as, since the 1990s, local, national and global rhetorics of remembrance appear equally layered at sites of memory both prominent and obscure. The recurrent motifs, symbols and visualization strategies of the Famine's recent commemoration (often described as 'inevitable' or 'natural' by those who selected them) must therefore be understood (borrowing from Alon Confino's definition of collective memory) as

> an outcome of the relationship between a distinct representation of the past and the full spectrum of symbolic representations in a given culture […] This approach also seeks to reconstruct the meaning of a given collective memory by using an intertwined, double move: placing it within a global historical context and a global symbolic universe, and analyzing the ideas, values, and practices embedded in and symbolized by its particular imagery.[8]

Scholars working from theories of representation and cultural constructions of knowledge have similarly noted how understandings of the Famine are

Trauma and Memory.' *Bealoideas: Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 69 (2001): 121–43.

7 Ó Ciosáin, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive,' 225.

8 Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History,' 1391.

constrained by processes of retrospective narration and representation. As Christopher Morash has observed:

> In the case of the Famine, it is the event itself which eludes definition. There is no single clear consensus as to what constituted the Famine […] there are no framing texts; there is no ceremonial beginning, no ceremonial ending […] Like all past events the Famine is primarily a retrospective textual creation. The starvation, the emigration, and the disease epidemics of the late 1840s have become "the Famine" because it was possible to inscribe those disparate, but interrelated events in a relatively cohesive narrative. For those of us born after the event, the representation has become the reality.[9]

That 'Famine memory' (insofar as such a phenomenon can be said to exist) may only be understood via its mediation and systems of representation has informed much subsequent scholarship on Famine literature, travelogues, folklore and other 'texts', often situated within postcolonial, feminist or similarly subaltern critical positions.[10] Accordingly, Wulf Kansteiner's recommendations for a critical methodology and cautious approach to collective memory as phenomenology – based on appraisals of its representation, agency and reception – offer similar value when applied to analyses of recent Famine commemorations:

> […] we should conceptualize collective memory as the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests.[11]

Whilst much recent scholarship on Famine memory has taken place within a critical context of expanding and actively interrogating of the nature of

9 Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 2–3.

10 These studies include Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997); Stuart McLean, *The Event and its Terrors: Ireland, Famine, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008); Marguérite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack, and Lindsay Janssen, eds., *Recollecting Hunger: Cultural Memories of the Great Famine in Irish and British Fiction, 1847–1920* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012).

11 Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory,' 180.

Famine 'collectivities' and shared memory in Ireland and the diaspora,[12] these perspectives should not be held as representative of the general tenor of Famine writing published around the time of the anniversary. In the popular arena judicious reflections on Famine memory were far outweighed by celebratory rhetoric and declarations of a shared Famine 'heritage' in the service of many, often conflicting, agendas. Critics of a 'cohesive' cultural memory of the Famine have included Ó Gráda, whose participation in commemorative initiatives throughout the 1990s prompted much critical reflection on misperceptions of Famine history that surfaced at both popular and official levels:

> The rhetoric of famine memory today, such as it is (or was a few years ago), is all inclusive. It is as if virtually all those living in Ireland during the famine were forced to die or emigrate, with knock-on effects on their traumatised descendants. But how could the memory of such an uneven and divisive disaster as the Irish Famine be truly collective? How could such a range of experiences have spawned a common memory? Surely, only by glossing over and filtering out much of the history of the famine?[13]

More stridently, Roy Foster's polemical critiques of the anniversary posited Famine commemoration as exemplifying 'the dangers of a new, deconstructed history, with its stress on the personal and the unmediated':

> As the political moves to the personal, the historian gives way to the pundit and the pop star: spectacularly, and ludicrously, demonstrated in some of the commentaries on the Great Famine during the commemorations of the mid 1990s […] Post-traumatic stress disorder stalked the land, buried 'memories' were indiscriminately exhumed, and 'survivor guilt' was ruthlessly appropriated from Holocaust studies and exhibited in the market place.[14]

12 See also James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2001); Mark McGowan, *Creating Canadian Historical Memory: The Case of the Famine Migration of 1847* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2006). The number of academic conferences devoted to the subject of Famine memory have continued to proliferate internationally: published proceedings include David A. Valone and Christine Kinealy, eds., *Ireland's Great Hunger: Silence, Memory, and Commemoration* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); David Valone, ed., *Ireland's Great Hunger: Relief, Representation, and Remembrance* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2010).

13 Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory,' 140.

14 Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (London: Allen Lane and the Penguin Press, 2001), xv.

The characterization of the Famine as cultural trauma – recurrent in both academic historiography and public discourse during the 1990s[15] – sought traces of its cultural aftershocks in contemporary society, and has been enacted as both critical methodology and collective diagnosis. Its pervasive influence on commemorative discourse and public monuments demonstrates how Famine memory was construed as both entity and agency – recoverable, and a pathway towards some form of cultural rehabilitation:

> The frail Famine voices now reach us across an aching void. We need to amplify that acoustic; in hearing them attentively, we might reclaim our Famine ghosts from their enforced silence and invisibility.[16]

Few other Irish historical experiences have (and still) command(ed) such a mix of moral obligation, political instrumentality and diverse historical and heritage practices, and the social context of its mass revival in the 1990s is revealing. Indeed, the 150th anniversary of the Famine formed a 'perfect storm' of a commemorative sort: occurring at a time of relative economic prosperity, its commemoration was easily activated (especially in the diaspora) amongst well-established, funded and organized social and ethnic networks. New scholarship on Famine history revived public interest and re-emphasized its transformational impact on Ireland and the diaspora, inaugurating and reviving debates on its impact and effects. Historically referenced by many diasporic communities as a foundational event, the Famine proved malleable to both Irish commemorative templates and models derived from other (unrelated) public commemorations of tragedy and loss. Most significantly, the variety of values assigned to Famine memory were diverse and seemed limitless – whether cast as a shameful incidence of 'silence' to be corrected by present generations, aligned with popular notions of historical trauma and apology, or providing the opportunity to assert ethnic identity within a climate of fraught cultural politics. Now construed as a defining moment of Irishness at home and abroad, the Famine's monumentalization could not but reflect a convergence of these forces. As David Lowenthal has remarked, 'we are bound to update the past whenever we engage with it; no matter how much we may feel we owe to or empathize with earlier epochs, we remain people of our own time.'[17]

Whilst the turn towards Famine memory has attracted both censure and celebration there yet remain few extended engagements with the actual

15 See Chapter 3.

16 Kevin Whelan, qtd. in Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory,' 137.

17 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 153.

commemorative outcomes of the 1990s, and the monuments and memorials that constitute the anniversary's most visible and enduring legacy.[18] Though considerations of Famine monuments and commemorations have been absorbed into some recent studies of Irish memory, this has often been done without full knowledge as to the true global scope of this activity, and without reference to the iconographical and visual cultural history (and contemporary culture of commemoration) of which they are a part. Margaret Kelleher's article 'Hunger and history: Monuments to the Great Famine' (2002) represents the first sustained survey of Famine monuments (in Kerry, Sligo, Galway, Mayo, Dublin and Massachusetts), astutely identifying even in this small sample the centrality of emigration to North American examples, the strength of 'trauma' as a conceptual framing device for commemoration, and the diversity of iconography selected and transformed – all themes to be revisited at length in the chapters which follow.[19] Kelleher's recounting of these monuments' processes of development, combined with critical insights into the nature of public memory and commemorative theory – as well as her inclusion of community memorials alongside major urban public artworks – is mirrored by the approach adopted in this book, which has drawn methodological and critical insights from the work of Pierre Nora, Jay Winter, James Young and Andreas Huyssen on public monuments and memory.[20] Since the waning of the commemorative period other Famine historians have weighed in with their assessments of its politics, polemics and permutations, including Christine Kinealy, Mary Daly, and Peter Gray[21]

18 Most scholarship to date has been concerned with specific geographic areas of commemoration (Ireland, Canada, the U.S., etc.) or addresses singular examples or small comparative groupings. A number of unpublished PhD dissertations featuring more sustained reflections on commemorative activity have also been produced, including John Crowley, 'Representing Ireland's Great Famine (1845-1852): A Cultural Geographic Perspective' (PhD thesis, University College Cork, 2003); Niamh Ann Kelly, 'History by Proxy: Imaging the Great Irish Famine' (PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2010); Colin McMahon, 'Ports of Recall: Memory of the Great Irish Famine in Liverpool and Montreal' (PhD thesis, York University, 2010). See also John Crowley, 'Constructing Famine Memory: The Role of Monuments.' In *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, ed. Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (2007), 55–68.

19 Margaret Kelleher, 'Hunger and History: Monuments to the Great Irish Famine.' *Textual Practice* 16, no. 2 (2002): 249–76.

20 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Pierre Nora, dir., *Realms Of Memory: The Construction Of The French Past*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 1997, 1998); James Young, ed., *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (New York/London: Prestel/Thames and Hudson, 1994); Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*.

21 Christine Kinealy, '"The Famine Killed Everything": Living with the Memory of the Great Hunger.' In *Ireland's Great Hunger: Silence, Memory, and Commemoration*,

– the latter of whom provides the most complete and balanced assessment of the commemorative period to date, addressing the centrality of Famine memory in Irish America, its political instrumentalization in Ireland and abroad, and how the commemorative impulse may be understood as a consequence of upheavals within contemporary society. Sufficient time has elapsed in order to bring some manner of historical perspective to these events, and this book thus joins the recent reinvigoration of scholarship re-examining the cultural memory and legacy of the Famine.

Like the phenomenon it addresses, any study of Famine memory can only ever be partial, subjective and exploratory, particularly as the value and currency of Famine remembrance remains an actively evolving quantity. This book is not a study of Famine historical experience, in the strictest sense, nor is it intended as a comprehensive survey of all shades of Famine memory, that vast and manifold range of belief and expression running chronologically since the nineteenth century across a global range of territories. By considering 'popular' and 'official' permutations of memory together in a multitude of commemorative contexts, it explores how disparate yet connected communities have coalesced globally around a singular anniversary and related set of historical experiences. Most importantly, it seeks to grant fuller presence to Famine monuments and visuality within studies of Irish and international memory, and contribute to a more textured understanding of the currency and transmission of collective identities and representations over time and within space.

ed. David A. Valone and Christine Kinealy (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 1–37; Mary Daly, 'Forty Shades of Grey? Irish Historiography and the Challenges of Multidisciplinarity.' In *Ireland Beyond Boundaries: Mapping Irish Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Liam Harte and Yvonne Whelan (London and Dublin: Pluto Press, 2007), 92–110; Peter Gray, 'Memory and Commemoration of the Great Irish Famine.' In *The Memory of Catastrophe*, ed. Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 46–64.

2
Visualizing the Famine: Nineteenth-Century Image, Reception and Legacy

If twentieth-century attempts to give visual form to Famine memory are to be understood within a tradition of Famine image-making, the obvious antecedents lie in the visual representations of the Irish Famine from the nineteenth century. How was the Famine visually represented and interpreted in its own time, and what meanings do such images communicate? The evolution of the visual culture and representational history of 'the Famine' has yet to be satisfactorily mapped, and the relationship of its nineteenth-century iconography to latter-day visualizations both troubles and intrigues. This central question of how 'famine' (conceptually and historically) might be represented in visual form – either directly or obliquely – is one that perplexed artists of the nineteenth century, much as it has those working on commemorative projects since the mid-1990s. The constraints of artistic convention, market forces and shifting ideological contexts have shaped how we 'see' the Famine from the 1840s through to today, and its representation remains a mercurial, emotional and highly politicized endeavour.

Who was depicting the Famine, and why? The crisis in Ireland during the 1840s was a topic of keen interest for British and Irish newspapers of the period, and the parallel ascendancy of illustrated periodicals sparked an influx of artists dispatched by editors to sketch images to be translated into wood engravings for mass reproduction. The literate British public were offered accounts of forays through Famine-stricken Ireland, continuing the tradition of the eighteenth-century scenic travelogue, but now mediated by the increasingly sophisticated technology and distribution systems of illustrated newspapers. By the 1840s early photography was in limited use in Ireland, but its pioneers were neither equipped nor inclined to train their camera's eye on social subjects until the 1880s.[1] Whilst certain of these later images

1 Justin Carville, *Photography and Ireland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 64–71. See also Fintan Cullen, 'Marketing National Sentiment: Lantern Slides of Evictions in

have been absorbed into the visual lexicon of the Famine,[2] no contemporary photograph of the Famine exists, and photography's impact on commemorative visualizations has been comparatively limited. Within the academy, a few painters (though no sculptors) turned their hand during the 1840s/50s to the subject of Ireland's distress, taking poverty, emigration or political unrest as their theme. Social pictures remained a minority interest until later in the century, when more numerous painted interpretations of the Irish (during and soon after the Famine period) offered increased evidence of how this catastrophic and proximate experience might be accommodated within the rigid confines of Victorian aesthetic principles. It has become commonplace to declare that the visual record of the Famine is disappointingly sparse and thus reinforce the Famine's reputation as an 'unrepresentable' event, yet a close examination and expansion of its visual history suggest otherwise: this is a history and legacy still waiting to be defined.

The need to critically reassess and reconstruct a visual history of Famine is lent urgency by the unproblematic manner in which most nineteenth-century depictions are absorbed today. Paintings of the Famine-era Irish and engravings familiar from *The Illustrated London News* and other periodicals are reproduced as illustration for historical and popular books, museum displays, websites and a wide range of commemorative publications and productions; yet relatively little scholarship has interrogated these images or developed a critical history of them in relation to the subjects they portray. With the exception of political/satirical cartoons,[3] Famine visual imagery has generally been utilized as a useful 'mimetic' illustration of archival historical studies rather than an object of inquiry in its own right. A survey of these images, contemporary with the experience of the Famine, raises a multitude of questions yet to be substantively addressed: the degree and extent of pictorial accuracy;

Late-Nineteenth Century Ireland.' In *A Shared Legacy: Essays on Irish and Scottish Art and Visual Culture (British Art & Visual Culture Since 1750: New Readings*, ed. Fintan Cullen and John Morrison (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 113–32.

2 For example, the covers of James S. Donnelly's *The Great Irish Potato Famine* and Robert Scally's *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine, and Emigration* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) feature eviction/social subject photographs dating from well beyond the Famine period. For other instances of later (mis)uses of eviction photography see Gail Baylis and Sarah Edge, 'The Great Famine: Absence, Memory and Photography.' *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 778–800, although the authors overstate the influence of photography (over painting and especially engraving) on subsequent visual practices.

3 See Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993); Peter Gray, 'Punch and the Great Famine.' *History Ireland* 1, no. 2 (1993): 26–33; Martin Weimer, *Das Bild der Iren und Irlands im Punch 1841-1921: Strukturanalyse des hiber* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993); L. Perry Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, 2nd ed. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

the relationship between reportage text and accompanying illustration; the deployment, frequency, and repetition of iconography; the investigation of ideological and political context; and their reception history.

Such gaps further complicate attempts to understand the currency and dissemination of these images from the nineteenth through to the twenty-first century. Why, for example, did the same dozen or so images recur in Famine commemorative productions, when hundreds exist? What factors have affected the consumption of these images and their impact on subsequent Famine visualizations? In 1996 Catherine Marshall described the 150th commemoration of the Famine as 'hampered by a dearth of visual material'[4] from the nineteenth century, yet I would argue this assertion has proved inaccurate on both counts: there is neither a dearth of visual material, nor did commemorative projects seem to have difficulty in accessing and utilizing such sources; nineteenth-century visualizations have indeed proven a fertile (if repetitive) inspiration for post-1990s commemorative projects. By expanding a restrictive view of what constitutes the Famine period, and bringing together painting and graphic work of the second half of the nineteenth century addressing Irish social subjects and Famine-related experiences, the representational history and visual culture of the Famine may be redrawn as a series of political, economic and artistic negotiations. The Famine's visual history and subsequent legacy emerge as a chaotic and culturally determined phenomenon constituted within Ireland's colonial relationship and the systems of visualization active during the Victorian period. Although this chapter is necessarily limited in its ability to wholly illuminate the complex topic of nineteenth-century Famine visuality, the filaments of meaning that stretch between 1847 and 1997 make an initial attempt at recovery fundamental. To this end, two separate categories of Famine representation will be examined which have yielded the most influence on more recent commemorative visualizations: 'fine art' in the academic tradition, and 'graphic art', focusing on engravings featured in the *Illustrated London News*, both of which form the first attempts to render the Famine and its effects visible to a wide public.

The Famine in fine art

Marshall's oft-echoed remarks on the paucity of Famine images are shaped by her concentration on 'fine art' representations (defined as 'painted or sculpted images'), which are of course vastly outnumbered by popular images found in

4 Catherine Marshall, 'Painting Irish History: The Famine.' *History Ireland* 4, no. 3, Autumn (1996): 46–50.

The Illustrated London News and other publications. Her article considers the relative absence of Irish historical depictions by academically-trained artists, and determines economic pressure concomitant with the unpopularity of Irish subject painting (owing to the uncomfortable politicization of poverty) as root cause.[5] However, a survey of the works Marshall includes raises important questions about common methods of 'Famine picture' classification. The five works illustrated are Robert Kelly's *An Ejectment in Ireland* or *A Tear and a Prayer for Erin* (1847), Frederick Goodall's *An Irish Eviction* (1850), Lady Elizabeth Butler's *Evicted* (1890), Henry Jones Thaddeus' *Eviction Scene* (1889), and Daniel Maclise's *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* (1854). With two of these works painted almost forty years after the food crisis, and a third's relation to the Famine (Maclise's) depending on a fairly loose allegorical interpretation, Marshall's choices gesture towards several points. First, that attention to paintings more sophisticated in their artistic achievements (such as Thaddeus' 'Caravaggesque' treatment of the eviction subject[6]) has perhaps overshadowed analyses of others engaged with social subjects but formally or politically problematic. Second, that paintings of Irish eviction scenes, as well as emotional and sentimental images of emigration, have come to be commonly identified as 'Famine' images, despite being far more prevalent in the post-Famine period with the height of their popularity in the 1880s/90s[7], complicating their status as 'Famine pictures' substantially. Third, the demarcation of what actually constitutes a 'Famine picture' is far from straightforward, which in itself reflects the complex social experience of Famine in all its manifestations.

To take the last point first, what constitutes a 'Famine-related subject'? In surveying its visual record across media, an array of categories emerge – including depictions of starvation and impoverished/emaciated human figures, representations of funereal rites and graveyards, depictions of relief efforts, scenes of evictions and emigration, satirical and political cartoons, genre scenes depicting the Irish peasantry and botanical/scientific illustrations (of potato fungus, for example). The diversity of the Famine 'subject' thus compels a wider confrontation with the various images that offer representations of how

5 Marshall, 'Painting Irish History,' 46–50. See also Catherine Marshall, 'History and Memorials: Fine Art and the Great Famine in Ireland.' In *Visual, Material and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. Ciara Breathnach and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 20–29; Catherine Marshall, 'Mapping the Great Famine in Irish Art.' In *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, ed. John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 632–7.

6 Marshall, 'Painting Irish History,' 49.

7 L. Perry Curtis' review of eviction representations (in text and image) makes this distinction clear: *The Depiction of Eviction in Ireland 1845-1920* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2011).

the Irish poor lived and looked in the 1840s. Most importantly, given that the idea of the 'Great' Famine of 1845–1850 is itself a retrospective categorization, a working definition of 'Famine imagery' should necessarily incorporate images concerned with the plight of Irish poverty and agrarian distress *generally*, as opposed to seeking out *particular* visual responses to a singular historical event. In other words, from the perspective of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century viewers, images of the Irish Famine are part of a larger genealogy of Irish genre and landscape depictions; what 'counts' as an interpretive image of the Famine proves quite flexible. A quick glance through the heavily illustrated histories *The Irish Famine* by Peter Gray (1995) and *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* by Noel Kissane (1995) published at the commencement of the 150th anniversary emphasizes this point: the former features over 100 distinct illustrations, the latter close to ninety.[8] While there is considerable truth in the observation that direct acknowledgments of the Famine in painted work are rare, depictions of its context and effects are not. With the field thus expanded, this study will examine four paintings that may be considered representative of the range of Famine-related painted works, insofar as they typify the political, emotional and stylistic range of Victorian-era Famine representations: Daniel MacDonald's *The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland* (1847), George Frederic Watts' *The Irish Famine* (1849–50), and Erskine Nicol's *An Ejected Family* (1853) and *Irish Emigrants Waiting for the Train* (1864). The circumstances of their creation, reception and relationship to conventions of nineteenth-century social subject painting reveal the variations and commonalities of an emerging iconology that forms the foundation of all subsequent Famine renderings.

The first half of the nineteenth century is a remarkable transition period in the visual representation of the British and Irish poor. With patronage for painting shifting increasingly to an affluent middle class, the advent of engraving within the mass media influencing artists' choice of subject matter, and the dynamics of British social relations changing in response to the intensifying poverty brought on by rapid industrialization, Irish subject painting would seem hardly recognizable by century's end.[9] Figures initially

8 Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995; reprint, 1997, 1999); Noel Kissane, ed., *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995). The recent, lavishly illustrated *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* (2012) further underscores the diversity and range (and perhaps growing contemporary knowledge) of nineteenth-century Famine-related images, as does the visual collection of the newly opened *Great Hunger Museum* at Quinnipiac University: Ruth Riddick, Judith Rodgers, and Mary Backer, eds., *Ireland's Great Hunger Museum* (Hamden CT: Quinnipiac University, 2012).

9 Nineteenth-century genre and subject painting remains an under-studied dimension of Irish art history; important exceptions include: Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, 'Framing the Irish: Victorian Paintings of the Irish Peasant.' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2, no. 2

subjugated within landscape are endowed with greater psychological complexity and agency, and the customs and activities of the poor and peasant classes emerged as appealing and marketable subjects of depiction. Though popularly consumed as commissions, purchases or via public exhibition and engraving during their own lifetimes, in the twentieth century vernacular pictures of the Irish have been relatively marginalized within theorized accounts of the development of painting. Social subject pictures are more typically valued for the evidence they provide of folk customs or social relationships than as works of art, and often without due consideration of their enduring influence on the iconography of Ireland in modern visual culture.

The current location of Daniel MacDonald's *The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland* (1847, Fig. 2.1) in the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin – the only work explicitly illustrating the potato failure painted by an Irishman during the Famine period – perhaps indicates such values.[10] Daniel MacDonald (1821-1853)[11] was an artist of uneven quality; a better landscapist than figure artist, the awkward pose of his central figure in the Famine picture reflects the 'naïve'[12] character of his other well-known genre works: *Sídhe Gaoithe (The Fairy-Blast)* (1841) and *Bowling Match at Castlemary, Cloyne* (1847). The painting operates under conventions reminiscent of earlier styles of genre painting, with its heavy-handed approach to narrative and symbolic imagery. An approaching storm darkens the landscape, ominously foreshadowing a harsh season ahead for a family deprived of its primary food source. It is a synthesis of picturesque and sublime effects, culminating in a scene of climactic discovery. Triggers for a sympathetic response are in abundance: a small, pretty child in rags, a baby left unattended and crying, and a moist-eyed dog beseeching its weeping owner are offered as objects of pathos.

(1997): 245–63; Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland, 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 116–59; Peter Murray, ed., *Whipping the Herring: Survival and Celebration in Nineteenth-Century Irish Art* (Cork: Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2006); Claudia Kinmonth, *Irish Rural Interiors in Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

10 The painting was a gift to the Folklore Collection from Cecil Woodham-Smith, as thanks for assistance with her book *The Great Hunger*. The Folklore Collection owns a number of significant social subject pictures (including Lady Elizabeth Butler's exceptional picture *Evicted*, 1890), which unfortunately suffer from poor access and viewing conditions.

11 Apart from short biographical references [Walter G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2 vols. (Dublin/London: Maunsel & Company, Ltd., 1913); Ann M. Stewart, *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts: Index of Exhibitors and their Works, 1826-1979*, 3 vols. (Dublin: Manton, 1985)] and contemporary critiques, relatively little is known of MacDonald's short life or artistic practice, with no monograph published to date.

12 Anne Crookshank and The Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters, 1600-1940* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 208.

Figure 2.1 *The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland*, Daniel MacDonald (1847)
By kind permission of the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore and the National Folklore Collection

The family's poverty and bleak discovery are frankly presented, yet it is not an unattractive picture; the viewer is not repulsed by shocking or disturbing imagery but compelled to appreciate the carefully composed, aesthetically framed dramatic moment. John Barrell has analyzed similar incongruities between subject and style in his work on eighteenth-century paintings of the rural poor, interpreting the work of Thomas Gainsborough, John Constable and George Morland as constrained by moral and social tensions subsequently disguised as aesthetic choices. His study tackles the predicament, unique to 'fine art' representations of the poor, of how they might become 'an acceptable part of the décor of the drawing rooms of the polite, when in their own persons they would have been unlikely to gain admission even to the kitchens.'[13] As with Barrell's examples from the eighteenth century, Famine subject pictures often convey the spectre of poverty through the language of the picturesque.

13 John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 5.

However, the version of the picturesque captured in this work owes more to John Ruskin's conception of the ethically charged picturesque than Edmund Burke's or the Reverend William Gilpin's more purely aestheticized rules of appreciation operative a century earlier.[14] Malcolm Andrews has described the ethical shift in the nature of the picturesque as a way of accommodating Victorian social reformist prerogatives within an aesthetic tradition irresistibly drawn to finding beauty in scenes of decay and ruin.[15] The reluctance of artists and viewers to abandon this mode of representation, even in the wake of growing criticism, precipitated a new method for validating the pleasurable viewing experience of the spectator. As Andrews notes, Ruskin's infusion of a 'moral conscience' into his terms of aesthetic appreciation allows him to simultaneously delight in the visual charm of a dilapidated cottage whilst rueing the social conditions which make it so:

> Miserable little back yards, opening to the water with stone steps down to it, and little platforms for the ducks [...] all exquisitely picturesque, and no less miserable. We delight in seeing the figures in these boats, pushing them about the bits of blue water, in Prout's drawings; but as I looked today at the unhealthy face and melancholy mien of the man in the boat [...] and of the people, men as well as women, who sat spinning gloomily at the cottage doors, I could not help feeling how many suffering persons must pay for my picturesque subject and happy walk.[16]

Ruskin is troubled by the suffering he views, but only so far as it involves a moral reflection that is, above all, self-centred.[17] Ruskin's contemplations do not lead to subsequent action; they inspire a sympathetic response that momentarily reaches outward towards the subject, but cannot supersede the aesthetic eye. The nineteenth-century social subject picture's privileging of individual feeling, over social transformation or action, thus demonstrates continuity with the ideological lacunae of eighteenth-century landscape

14 John Ruskin, 'Of the Turnerian Picturesque.' In *Modern Painters* (New York: United States Book Company, 1856); Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1757); William Gilpin, *Three Essays : On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching* (London: Printed for R. Blamire, 1792).

15 Malcolm Andrews, ed., *The Picturesque: Literary Sources and Documents*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1994), 26–35.

16 Ruskin qtd. in Andrews, *The Picturesque*, 34–5.

17 Raimonda Modiano has similarly examined the narcissistic functionality of the picturesque in response to the 'beggar' subject: Raimonda Modiano, 'The Legacy of the Picturesque: Landscape, Property, and the Ruin.' In *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape, and Aesthetics Since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 196–219.

painting. Neither relationship to the subject demands real engagement with reform, nor challenges the normative order of class and circumstance. The representation of the poor on canvas did not always entail a condemnation of their condition; poverty could be appreciated for its potential simply as a vehicle for moral contemplation and edification. As a consequence, the elision of beauty and suffering was still possible, even desirable, within the self-contained system of the 'ethical' picturesque. This rationality may partially explain why MacDonald's painting, centred on an event of such devastating consequence and seen through the eyes of an Irishman, might fail to transcend the conventions of rural romanticization. It is a painting still searching to please its viewer, a viewer satisfied by engaging with the tragedy on no more than a cathartic level.

If the conditions of the ethical picturesque are one method of interpreting MacDonald's work, the question of Irish passivity in the wake of the Famine offers another. A mystifying and devastating disaster on the scale of the potato blight was perhaps inevitably interpreted in many quarters, across religious, ethnic, and class lines, as an event of major religious significance. For certain segments of British society, however, often evangelical in their views of how the Irish might be 'improved', the blight was construed alternately as a divine punishment for popery or as a rebuke to the 'lazy Irish' who perpetuated a foolish dependency on the potato as a subsistence crop. From such a narrow Malthusian worldview of industry pitted against indolence, the Famine offered a heaven-sent corrective opportunity and moral lesson for the poor. This pitiless form of providentialism found its most disturbing expression in Sir Charles Trevelyan, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury under Lord John Russell's administration responsible for Irish relief measures from 1846[18]:

> I think I see a bright light shining in the distance through the dark cloud which at present hangs over Ireland [...] The deep and inveterate root of Social evil remains, and I hope I am not guilty of irreverence in thinking that, this being altogether beyond the power of man, the cure has been applied by the direct stroke of an all wise Providence in a manner as unexpected and unthought of as it is likely to be effectual. God grant that we may rightly perform our part and not turn into a curse what was intended for a blessing.[19]

18 Perhaps more than any single individual, Trevelyan has been the focus of subsequent commentators and historians' criticism for his role in exacerbating the Famine catastrophe: Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, 20.

19 Charles Trevelyan, 'Letter to Lord Monteagle' (9 October 1846), Monteagle Papers, MS 13, 397/1, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Available also via http://multitext.ucc.ie.

While MacDonald's painting hardly shares this view of the blight as 'blessing' or a cure for 'social evil', it similarly centres the event as a catastrophe beyond the comprehension and agency of its human victims. Each figure responds individually to the discovery, frozen at the moment of realization, and entirely at the mercy of natural elements. The metaphor used by Trevelyan, of light/darkness representing recovery/disaster, is articulated in the extract and the painting through weather symbolism. For Trevelyan and other like-minded individuals who believed in an economic and social philosophy governed by 'natural' laws, this type of imagery was intuitively suited to their ideological world-view. For MacDonald, it presented a visual solution to depicting an event whose causes and far-reaching consequence were not yet understood. It may, in fact, represent an early point of intersection between British and Irish views on the Famine, before political, administrative, and humanitarian incompetence diverged them irrevocably.

The Discovery of the Potato Blight was exhibited at the British Institution in 1847; like many Irish artists of the period, MacDonald had moved to London in 1845, presumably in search of the greater opportunities for training, exhibition, and patronage the capital afforded. No comment was recorded on the piece, but it is reasonable to assume that the hegemonic forces at play in institutionalized exhibitions like the Royal Academy or the British Institution[20] greatly reduced the likelihood of any Irish Famine subject painting deviating from dominant and politically acceptable perceptions of the event. Julian Treuherz asserts that while 'scenes of everyday life' proliferated in the 'hungry forties', art was much slower to embrace socially challenging themes than other media; the robust social criticism abundantly present in literature, journalism, and politics during the 1840s is not reflected in art until later in the century.[21] MacDonald's painting certainly supports this assessment and, with its specifically Irish provenance, may also go some way to suggest that differences between Irish and British representations of the Famine subject should not be overstated. With little precedent or taste for social realism in art, the lingering effect of the picturesque aesthetic, and a conflicted perception of the Famine as an event outside human control, MacDonald's picture falls easily into what Christopher Wood describes as the insistence that 'if poverty was to be painted at all, then it should be converted into something agreeable and harmless, arousing a sympathetic tear but not a desire for social revolution.'[22]

20 Paul Barlow and Colin Trodd, eds., *Governing Cultures: Art Institutions in Victorian London* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2000).

21 Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Manchester City Art Gallery, 1987), 14.

22 Christopher Wood, *Victorian Panorama: Paintings of Victorian Life* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1976; reprint, 1990), 49.

No exhibition of what is now termed Victorian 'social realist' art in England was mounted until 1988, reflecting both the relatively recent coinage of the term, and its minor place within British art practice.[23] In spite of our interest in these scenes today, they only occasionally engaged the attention of the most accomplished artists, usually placed well below the more highly esteemed occupations of historical or landscape painting. One significant exception was the English painter George Frederic Watts (1817–1904).[24] Watts epitomizes in many ways the predicament of late Victorian artists straddling the age between neoclassical works couched in flamboyant and lofty rhetoric and the advent of new directions in painting marked by JMW Turner. Watts' artistic aspirations involved no less than the wholesale reinvigoration of British art, delivered through the medium of history and high-minded allegorical painting (reflected in his nicknames 'England's Michelangelo' and 'The Titian of Kensington'). The titles of his paintings indicate his proclivity towards the universal: *Love and Death* (1857) and *Hope* (1886) are typical examples. Watts' belief in art's transcendent ability to serve as moral and intellectual inspiration was in no small part related to his deep sensitivity to current social conditions. Following extended study in Italy (1843–7), Watts' personal correspondence conveyed his dismay at the London squalor which greeted his return:

> Objects of distress that have come under my observation during the last two or three days have induced me to reflect seriously that I have no right to throw away any means of being useful […] The cold that nips me up makes me feel for others. I think every poor shivering wretch I meet has a right to revile me for wanting charity […] Today I saw a poor woman whose appearance evidenced better days, applying for relief at the workhouse (which was refused). £20 would have gone far to set up the poor trembling brokenhearted creature […][25]

23 Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 7. On the evolution of 'social realism' as category, see Philip McEvansoneya, *"Dismal Art" or "strong, realistic pictures"? Luke Fildes, Frank Holl and "social realism"*. PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 1994.

24 Celebrated during his lifetime as one of England's most accomplished painters, Watts enjoyed a long and prosperous career, earning the admiration of John Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and the fanatic devotion of his wife, whose adulatory account of her husband [M.S. Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1912)] may be tempered by contemporary friend and biographer G.K. Chesterton, *G.F. Watts* (London: Duckworth, 1904; reprint, 1975). Later and more measured biographies include Wilfrid Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo': A Biography of George Frederic Watts, O.M., R.A.* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975); Veronica Franklin Gould, *G.F. Watts: The Last Great Victorian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).

25 Qtd. in Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo'*, 54.

Such scenes of social deprivation compelled Watts to paint four related canvases in 1849-50 that constitute some of the earliest examples of Victorian social realism in fine art: *Found Drowned*, *The Song of the Shirt* (also known as *The Sempstress*), *Under a Dry Arch*, and *The Irish Famine*, also known as *An Irish Eviction* (Fig. 2.2).[26] The paintings are similar in their murky palette, absence of narrative detail and de-particularization of place, and focus on an iconic figure or figure group to express the pathos of the subject. *Found Drowned* and *The Song of the Shirt* feature subjects that would become favourites of the social realist genre: female suicide and the plight of the labouring seamstress.[27] *Under a Dry Arch* and *The Irish Famine* both treat the theme of the social outcast and homelessness, the former depicting an aged woman taking refuge under a river bridge, and the latter a family recently evicted from their home.

Whilst the other three canvases isolate a single female 'pathetic figure'[28] as subject and likely draw from social journalism in addition to Watts' personal witnessing of such hardships, *The Irish Famine* most certainly represents a scene Watts never encountered first-hand for he did not visit Ireland until 1850, when he travelled to the home of his poet friend Aubrey de Vere in Limerick. In his invitation to Watts to visit Ireland, de Vere remarked upon the 'second-sight vision' that must have inspired the artist to create his picture of the Famine.[29] Indeed, de Vere's own lengthy poem on the Famine in Ireland, 'The Year of Sorrow – Ireland – 1849' bears a striking resemblance to (and very possibly inspired) the image finally created by Watts:

> In horror of a new despair
> His blood-shot eyes the peasant strains,
> With hands clenched fast, and lifted hair,
> Along the daily-darkening plains.[30]

26 The canvas of *The Irish Famine* originally featured a scene from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* of the queen Panthea (sixth century B.C.), which was overpainted by Watts following a dispute with its patron Alexander Ionides (traces are still visible). See Blunt, *England's Michelangelo*, 47–48; Gould, *G.F. Watts: The Last Great Victorian*, 29.

27 See Barbara Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Christina Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (London: Owen, 1981). The vogue for depictions of female seamstresses was sparked by the publication of Thomas Hood's enormously popular poem *Song of the Shirt*, which appeared in *Punch* in 1843 and was the basis for Watts' picture.

28 Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 24.

29 Watts, *George Frederic Watts*, vol. 2, 126.

30 Aubrey de Vere, *Irish Odes and Other Poems* (New York: The Catholic Publications Society, 1869).

Figure 2.2 *The Irish Famine*, George Frederic Watts (1849-50)
Courtesy of the Watts Gallery, Compton, England

The work clearly reflects Watts' recent Italian immersion, with its correspondence to images of the Holy Family and its nod to monumental pyramidal composition. Unusually for Irish subjects of the period, no attempt is made at a distinctive landscape or at capturing local or ethnic 'colour'; the dual titles (*The Irish Famine/An Irish Eviction*) further point to the ambiguity of the specifics of the scene. Instead, emphasis is placed on the symbolic, tragic and universal experience of suffering, themes shared by all of the works in the series. Each painting offers an example of humanity crushed and forgotten, overlaid with potent Christian sacrificial connotations: the glowing, crucifixion-like pose of *Found Drowned*; the seamstress as medieval female martyr; the persecuted family and massacred innocent. Painted at a large scale unusual for social subject pictures – *The Irish Famine* is 198 × 180 cm, twice the size of MacDonald's *Discovery of the Potato Blight* – the paintings strive to elevate their sanctified subjects, instead of presenting mere spectacles of pity.

Viewing *The Irish Famine* in the context of the series underscores how

the Famine was considered but one of the social crises of the tumultuous 1840s: each canvas pleads for the condition of the poor and oppressed generally, but avoids political comment or specific indictment, and *The Irish Famine* is nowhere visually distinguished as particularly 'Irish'. Despite the classical veneer and ambiguous politics that might have rendered them more appealing, none of the paintings (excepting *Found Drowned*) received public exhibition until 1881.[31] Critical response to the four canvases' exhibition thirty years later, at the Grovesnor Gallery from 1881–2, suggests they yet retained the ability to shock and dismay. One critic described them as works 'upon which visitors to the Gallery will not like to linger', whilst another vacillated between admiration and censure:

> […] there are two or three scenes of London life amongst the poorer classes, of great power. "Under a Dry Archway" is probably the most intense expression of that tragedy of hopeless pauperism […] the hand with which Mr. Watts has treated his subject is as unsparing as it is powerful: this is no "sentimental, picturesque wretchedness" (as George Eliot puts it), but simply a statement of how low a human being can sink, and how miserably she can die, in the greatest city of the world. […] It has a singular effect, this silent problem that hangs upon the walls of the most aesthetic gallery in London, and is surrounded by portraits of beauties, and statesmen, and warriors, and divines. Bad policy, Mr. Watts, to confront these "curled darlings" with so vital a question. You come too close home Sir to our consciences, to be agreeable.'[32]

Watts' biographer Wilfrid Blunt also notes that the paintings were subsequently omitted from his major one-man exhibition in 1896-7.[33] Watts never returned to such direct representations, although later allegorical paintings still commented obliquely on the human failings that formed the basis for social tragedy. His subsequent work (apart from portraits) concentrated increasingly on abstract allegory, what he called his 'symbolical' work, and despite the flowering of British social realism in the late nineteenth century his energies were permanently fixed elsewhere. Watts' branch of social subject representation was to meet a

31 *Found Drowned* was likely exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1862: see Bills and Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary*, 112–115.

32 Blunt, *'England's Michelangelo'*, 211; 'Mr Watts' Painting. The Grovesnor Gallery – First Notice', *The Spectator*, 7 January 1882, 15.

33 Blunt, *England's Michelangelo*, 211. Though the paintings were displayed in Watts' studio home Little Holland House, their relative exclusion from public exhibition for several decades perhaps indicates how the works were both atypical in Watts' oeuvre, and unusual in theme, scale and perspective for their time.

dead end as painters turned to other models and modes of depiction, but the spirit and earnestness of his work anticipate the graphic and painted social realism of the 1880s/90s.

If Watts' painting represents the philosophical apex of Famine representation, the work of the Scottish painter Erskine Nicol (1825-1904) constitutes its opposite.[34] Time spent in Ireland between 1845 and 1850 (and his regular return to a country retreat/studio in Co. Westmeath) provided Nicol with an abundance of source material he was to draw upon throughout his career: scenes of peasant country life, usually Irish in derivation, although his Scottish and Irish scenes are at times indistinguishable. His pictures run the gamut of provincial tragedy and comedy: festivals, eviction, emigration and miscellaneous genre scenes tending towards the humorous. Though his contemporaries criticized his attention to 'low' subject matter, he was acknowledged as a capable and accomplished painter.[35] An Associate of the Royal Academy, his small, cabinet-sized paintings were heavily engraved and widely consumed by popular audiences. Though enormously successful in his day, Nicol's inclination towards stereotyped depictions of the Irish 'Paddy' and titles like *Spake, Darlin* (1868) and *Waitin' for the Praties* (1852) are arguably more grating than charming to modern ears.

Despite his reliance on a relatively narrow field of subject matter, Nicol's range of expression within the provincial vignette is quite varied. The mixed criticism of his work reflects this range: some characterize his painting as possessing 'a feeling of reality which sets them apart from most of his contemporaries'[36]; 'a humorous painter'[37]; or one who 'could be offensive and coarse, stretching his humorous spirit too far' but was 'fundamentally fond of Ireland and its people'[38]. His paintings alternate between crude Paddywhackery and sympathetic depictions of the plight of the poor, and his inconsistency is problematic for anyone wishing to ascribe a definitive mindset or dismiss Nicol as a relic of pejorative Victorian attitudes towards the Irish. Nicol's paintings offer the modern viewer a window onto this equivocal relationship between the poor and those who painted them or, in Barrell's words, how painting could 'represent those who are not in a position to represent themselves'.[39]

34 A full monograph of Nicol's life and work is yet to be written. See James Dafforne, 'British Artists: Their Style and Character. Erskine Nicol, R.S.A., A.R.A.' *Art Journal (London)* March 1 (1870): 65–7; James L. Caw, *Scottish Painting, Past and Present* (Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1908); David Irwin and Francina Irwin, *Scottish Painters at Home and Abroad* (London: Faber, 1975).

35 Dafforne, 'British Artists'.

36 Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 208.

37 Irwin and Irwin, *Scottish Painters*, 304.

38 Nicola Figgis and Brendan Rooney, *Irish Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2001), 15.

39 John Barrell, 'Introduction.' In *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on*

Notwithstanding the observation that Nicol, despite his residence in Ireland during the worst years of the Famine, never directly painted the subject, it is his sentimental version of Famine-era Ireland (and not Watts') that was to prove the more enduring vein of representation.

Nicol shares much in common with Thomas Faed (1826–1900), his Scottish contemporary who also specialized in sentimental genre scenes of the poor. Faed's great Academy success *The Mitherless Bairn* (1855) utilizes many of the same tropes effected by Nicol: the phonetic title, identifiably racial character and melodramatic scene of an orphaned, homeless boy about to burst into tears. Like Nicol, Faed's painting is probably 'more social than realist'[40]; like Nicol, his views of poverty are carefully constructed and highly theatrical. As Claudia Kinmonth has noted, Nicol's use of props and rural people as models was intended to capture a 'sense of reality' that endeared his work to the public of time;[41] indeed, these composed arrangements of rural life were celebrated for their studied and supposedly authentic evocations of peasant character and experience. Yet, before representations of the poor in British painting were to acquire the tint of reformist zeal that imbued later forms of social realism, the satirical and/or moral overtones of mid-century genre scenes began to give way to such sentimental and often saccharine renderings. Faed and Nicol belong to this strand of idealized poverty: harsh realities of lower-class existence are muted, and depictions of the poor aestheticized or romanticized so as to appear an organic extension of a 'natural' social order. In the case of Ireland, scenes of picturesque poverty had a potent ideological dimension, related to the Malthusian doctrine of laissez-faire economics, colonial expectations of self-sufficiency and the perceived moral failure of the Irish to prevent or deal with the ravages of the Famine.

Often contrasted with the accomplishments of Wilkie, Nicol's work was sometimes criticized for being 'over-fond of the Irishman of farce'.[42] The suggestion in an 1870 review that Nicol should attempt 'more elevated phases of Irish life and character'[43] indicates the contemporary opinion that his brand of humour, however popular, might aspire to do more than entertain. However, humour, like the picturesque, also works to reinforce class hierarchy and render troubling shifts in the social order more immediately palatable.

Though Nicol's output of comic, jovial scenes of Paddywhackery is

British Art 1700–1850, ed. John Barrell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

40 Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 41.

41 Claudia Kinmonth, 'Rural Life Through Artists' Eyes: An Interdisciplinary Approach.' In *Whipping the Herring*, ed. Peter Murray (Cork: Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2006), 34–45.

42 Caw, *Scottish Painting*, 164.

43 Dafforne, 'British Artists,' 65.

punctuated with more nuanced and complex depictions of social life (such as *Donnybrook Fair*, 1859, or *The 16th, 17th (St Patrick's Day), and 18th March*, 1856), his work compels little viewer identification with its subject. Humour is located in the latter's inability to grasp the complexity of modern life comfortably negotiated by the viewer; the perceived menace of the Irish rural exodus which preoccupied public discourse of the period is seldom perceptible. Such images are drawn from the real world, but they are essentially artistic entertainments, not social criticisms. Nicol's paintings of evictions and other tragic subjects, more sensitive in their rendering of scenes of distress and displacement, nevertheless anticipate a spectacular and sentimental response.

That pictures of poverty should work primarily as evocations of viewer emotion is the cornerstone of sentimentalism as a visual strategy, yet there has been considerable recent debate over its function within Victorian artistic practice. Some have argued for the rehabilitation of the sentimental aesthetic, usually on the basis of its connection to philanthropic action and the development of individual moral and ethical capacities.[44] Painting dismissed in the modern period as mawkish or emotionally indulgent is thus redeemed as a worthy expression of charitable sentiment and moral idealism that was well-intended in principle, if not always in practice. On this basis, sentimentality is celebrated for the positive qualities it emphasizes (generosity, sincerity, moral steadfastness) rather than those elements it chooses to exclude. Viewed ideologically, however, we can begin to discern that one of the primary characteristics of sentimentalism, even when viewed positively, is its closed structure. As Ciarán Benson has remarked:

> Sentimentality is repetition, a closed loop of feeling. It involves an attitude to art as the occasion for activating emotion already familiar to the person and desired by them for that very reason. The work of art, and it need not be a good one, functions as a trigger for feelings tied to other purposes. It is the repetition of the experience in a near reflex way that is the purpose of the music or poem or whatever.[45]

The narrow system of emotional reciprocity fundamental to artistic sentimentality thus limits its representational possibilities. Such limitations would eventually be rejected by artists of the Aesthetic and later movements associated with a burgeoning modernism; however, the value of sentimentalism

44 Robert C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

45 Ciarán Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of Self* (London: Routledge, 2001), 219.

Figure 2.3 *An Ejected Family*, Erskine Nicol (1853)
Courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland

as an aesthetic of power underlines its popularity for representations of the nineteenth-century poor, and especially the colonized Irish.

Erskine Nicol's painting *An Ejected Family* (1853, Fig. 2.3) is one example of his more serious social subject pictures conected to the Famine and its aftermath. Nicol often dealt with themes of land ownership, tenant/landlord relationships and the tragedy of eviction, including his works *The Tenant* (1880), *Notice to Quit* (1862), *The Renewal of the Lease Refused* (1863), *The Deputation* (1865), *Paying the Rent* (1866), and *Signing the New Lease* (1868). Like his comic works, these paintings present a tableau enacted by recognizable types, neutering his work of any explicit political sentiments. Accompanying an engraved reproduction of his painting *Renewal of the Lease Refused*, a contemporary critique commended Nicol for his ability to pictorially render 'Irish manners' whilst avoiding the prickly nuisance of Irish politics:

> Whatever political opinions Mr. Nicol may entertain about the numerous alleged "Wrongs of Ireland", we do not suppose that he intended to make anything but artistic capital out of the relationship of landlord and tenant as existing in the sister-island [...] we in our critical capacity, are not called upon to express any opinion upon this debatable question, nor does the closest examination of Mr. Nicol's

> painting throw the least light upon it, so as to lead to a just conclusion about the rights or wrongs of either party.[46]

Nevertheless, the author appraises the presumed social respectability of the subject on the basis of Nicol's depiction (verbalizing his description as if the tenant were a real individual and not simply a character type): 'The man is decent-looking enough, and probably has done his best to turn his holding to good account.' This act of moral evaluation, however, is defended as artistic appreciation of Nicol's treatment of character psychology. For this critic, the scene's success is dependent both on its painterly execution, and whether 'the relationship of landlord and tenant' is convincingly recreated, not in terms of any documentary or critical function: 'Our duty is, happily, to look at it from the point presented to us by a most skilful delineator of Irishmen and Irish manners, and not that offered by landlords and tenants and by party-politicians.'[47] An overview of Nicol's eviction and tenant subject pictures, however, indicates a generally positive bias towards the encumbered tenantry and sympathy towards their precarious position, despite his refraining from engaging directly in political comment.

An Ejected Family shares much in common with *The Discovery of the Potato Blight*: like MacDonald, Nicol utilizes the multi-generational family group as subject; the figures are similarly grouped centrally in an evocative landscape, and illuminated against a dark, tumultuous sky. The figure of the pitiful 'innocent' is embodied in the small child on the left side of the composition who gazes uncomprehendingly at her family. Differences between the two pictures point to Nicol's particular talent and fondness for capturing 'character': 'his adroit touch is singularly happy in its application to the suntanned faces of pronounced physiognomy and dilapidated costume.'[48] The confrontation of powerful malign forces against the helpless poor and the dramatic circumstances of resistance, possible violence or helpless anguish which attended the experience rendered evictions an increasingly appealing subject for the genre painter. Indeed, eviction paintings are prevalent enough in the later nineteenth century to have been dubbed a 'subgenre' by one historian.[49] These eviction compositions are formulaic and reflect very closely

46 '*Renewal of the Lease Refused* from the Collection of Alfred Harris Esq., Ashfield, Bingley.' *Art Journal (London)* July 1 (1870), 200.

47 '*Renewal of the Lease Refused* from the Collection of Alfred Harris Esq., Ashfield, Bingley.'

48 William D. McKay, *The Scottish School of Painting* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1906), 347–51.

49 L. Perry Curtis Jr., 'The Land For the People: Post-Famine Images of Evictions.' In *Éire/Land*, ed. Vera Kreilkamp (Chestnut Hill: Chicago University Press, 2003), 85–92. See also Julian Campbell, 'The Representation of Everyday Life in Irish

Figure 2.4
Irish Emigrants Waiting for the Train, Erskine Nicol (1864)
© Tate, London 2013

the design used by MacDonald; this repetition of type exhibits the circularity common to sentimental representations. As one might expect from paintings created years after the initial encounter with the subject, Nicol's patently constructed scenes offer a verisimilitude of reality, but a wholly contrived one. Nicol's depiction of the eviction edges close to 'an emotional stage Irish scene',[50] in stark contrast to contemporaneous accounts of the horrors of Irish evictions and destitution, indicative of the gap between the limits of Victorian textual versus visual representation. Moreover it exemplifies the conscription of Famine-related subject painting within sentimental tropes, whose influence has proved difficult to escape in the modern period, even as viewer expectations of subject engagement have radically shifted.

More numerous and varied than any other type of Famine-related subject pictures are scenes of emigration.[51] Certainly emigration had been a common

Painting.' In *Whipping the Herring*, ed. Peter Murray (Cork: Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2006), 24–33.

50 Brian P. Kennedy, *Irish Painting* (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 1993; reprint, 1997), 20; Marie Bourke and Síghle Breathnach-Lynch, *Discover Irish Art at the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1999), 116.

51 Key discussions of Irish emigrant painting include Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 135–46;

Figure 2.5 *Outward Bound* (left), *Homeward Bound* (right), Erskine Nicol, (1850s) Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

aspect of social experience in Ireland and Britain for centuries, but cheaper fares, established chains of migration, and increasingly desperate economic conditions (in Ireland and throughout the British Isles) as the nineteenth century progressed sparked unprecedented waves of emigrants crowding the port towns and cities of Cobh, Dublin and Liverpool, with total emigration rates from the British Isles tripling between 1845 and 1850.[52] As with eviction, the subject of emigration offered ample occasion for stirring depiction; the intensely emotional (and increasingly shared) moment of a loved one's departure from homestead, station or portside appealed to and drew depiction from a wide artistic community from mid-century onwards. From Paul Falconer Poole's *The Emigrants' Departure* (1838) to Ford Madox Brown's celebrated *The Last of England* (1855) to Hubert von Herkomer's *Pressing to the West: A Scene in Castle Garden, New York* (1884), the divergent interests of painters who attempted such subjects makes generali-

Patricia Tyron MacDonald, *Exiles and Emigrants: Epic Journeys to Australia in the Victorian Era* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2005).

52 W.A. Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1929), 305.

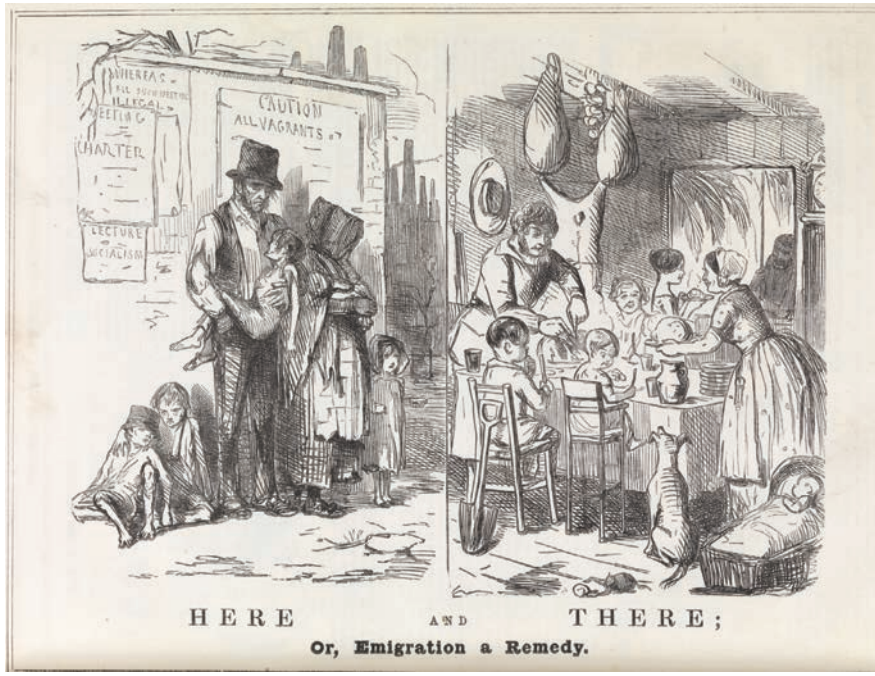


Figure 2.6 'Here and There; Or, Emigration A Remedy', *Punch*, 15 July 1848
Courtesy of Trinity College Dublin

zation difficult; romantic and realist treatments may be found of English, Scottish and Irish scenes (occasionally, but not always racially distinct). Nonetheless, the realist view of emigrant experience continued to draw criticism for its artlessness in depicting ugliness and misery, as John Ruskin's stinging comments on Herkomer's work indicate:

> Some artists are apt to become satirists and reformers instead of painters; to use the indignant passion of their freedom no less vainly than if they had sold themselves into slavery. Thus Mr. Herkomer, whose true function is to show us the dancing of Tyrolese peasants to the fife and zither, spends his best strength in painting a heap of promiscuous emigrants in the agonies of starvation.[53]

Despite the efforts of painters like Herkomer who sought a more critical view of social displacement, the experience of emigrants usually met the same visual fate as the victim of eviction: emotive, poignant despair located in

53 Ruskin, qtd. in Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 96.

the figures of a multi-generational family symbolizing departure, death, loss and (more rarely) arrival and hope. Erskine Nicol's *Irish Emigrants Waiting for the Train* (1864, Fig. 2.4)[54] was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1864; other works on similar themes include *Outward Bound* and its companion *Homeward Bound* (mid 1850s, Fig. 2.5), and *Irish Emigrant Arriving at Liverpool* (1871). Again, the political context of departure is obscured; there is no indication of why the individuals depicted are emigrating, although the sorrow of the scene is once more personified by a central female figure in distinctive, colourful dress. Such a representation stretches the boundaries of the category 'Famine-related subject', as neither main character appears too worse for wear, nor is there any direct reference to Famine-wrought hardship. As we have seen, however, pictorial accuracy was no prerequisite for images of the Irish poor during the 1840s; twenty years later, Nicol's work is evidence of the manner by which types are sustained through time without regard to specificity of circumstance or context. The painting might be interpreted as a study of character contrasts: the delicately featured female figure sits in melancholic, wistful reverie, whilst her companion, a rough country labourer, seems poised in mid-exclamation, his insouciant posture and expression suggesting a coarse if harmless bumpkin.

The figures' juxtaposed mental states are one of the dichotomous representational tropes utilized frequently to frame the emigration subject: home/away, poverty/success, the heavy-hearted backward glance versus the confident or fearful gaze into the future. The similarly-themed cartoon 'Here and There: Or, Emigration a Remedy' published in *Punch* in 1850 (Fig. 2.6) presents a crudely reduced version of emigration as 'cure' for domestic impoverishment. Yet most pictures focus on the moment of departure, not arrival; the future remains a mythologized unknown. Paintings such as Nicol's (and many others of similar theme and approach) capture less the reality of emigration than a construct simplifying the emotions involved, and the response expected from viewers – reflecting a gentle, passive acceptance of what undoubtedly constituted a painful and bitter inevitability for many. Avoidance of discomforting imagery persisted even as such pictures were celebrated for their emotional poignancy or truth of detail,[55] in line with the Victorian propensity for filtering difficult subjects through more palatable compositions.[56] The

54 Two nearly identical versions of this work are in the collections of the Tate Gallery and Sheffield Art Museums.

55 Bhreathnach-Lynch, 'Framing the Irish,' 250–51.

56 As Julian Treuherz notes, 'Emigration was shown by departures or the reading of letters, without picturing the slum conditions which caused the exodus; disease was typically portrayed as a pale convalescent, often a pretty child; death was painted in terms of funerals and mourners, with rarely a corpse in sight' (Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 10).

malleability of the subject of emigration to existing and evolving modes of representation (be they picturesque, sentimental or realist) may further explain its persistent popularity within British and Irish genre painting, a distinction which has continued through to the present. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the emigrant construct – both the here/there formal device, and associated narratives of loss, arrival and becoming – would come to dominate Famine commemorative renderings, especially in the diaspora.

Indeed, many conventions of nineteenth-century painting have proven themselves remarkably durable, and their redeployment in recent commemorative projects demonstrates how Victorian visualizations (centred on eviction, emigration and the sentimentalized Irish poor) have maintained a steady grip upon the popular imagination, even in the wake of modernism and the rejection of Victorian aesthetic sensibilities in other artistic contexts. The spectacle of Irish suffering – in its nineteenth-century painted formulations, and the twentieth-century commemorations that borrow their iconography and functionality – continues to evoke contradictory responses of censure, repulsion, fascination and empathy. Nevertheless, the widespread contemporary recourse to colonially inscribed and problematic framings of the Famine's effects suggests that troubling questions – of how an unimaginable Famine may be made visible, and how its latter-day representations may transcend the limits of its visual record – remain profoundly unresolved.

Newspaper illustration and the figure of Famine

Perhaps no single source has contributed more to the visual history of the Famine than the illustrated periodical press. Newspaper woodblock engravings have emerged as the iconic visual images of the Irish Famine, whether serving as chapter dividers for Joseph O'Connor's bestselling novel *The Star of the Sea* (2002), inspiration for contemporary children's book illustration (as in David Ross' *Children of the Great Hunger*, 2002) or frequent models for commemorative monument projects. Yet the proliferation of these graphic images is mainly due to the coincidence of the Famine with the rise of illustrated popular weeklies; had the Famine occurred fifty, even twenty years earlier, the visual history of the Famine would unquestionably have been poorer. Equally, the Famine period of 1845-1850 precedes the most energetic era of social journalism, which saw the rise of *The Graphic* (1869-1923) and other mass publications focused exclusively on social concerns and reform. Accordingly, in contrast to the great number of newspapers and journals which reported on the potato crisis, a study of mass-produced woodblock illustration can be confined to a relatively small number of publications, including the *Illustrated London News*, *Punch*, *The*

Lady's Newspaper, *Pictorial Times*, *The Weekly Freeman*, *Historic Times*, *The Puppet Show*, and various American publications, such as *Gleason's Pictorial* (Boston) and *Harper's Weekly*. Of these, the *Illustrated London News* unquestionably offers the most numerous and best-known examples.

Interest in readdressing Famine-era literary and folklore representations has gained momentum in recent years, and in many ways might seem to parallel research into a Famine visuality inclusive of popular illustration. Studies of Famine literature (contemporary to the event and afterwards) have been central in refuting long-held assumptions that 'silence' was the prevailing literary response to the crisis, alternatively demonstrating its breadth, points of symmetry and, most crucially, its intertextuality:

> […] no narrative of the Famine is ever pure. Every Famine text partakes of other discourses […] As such, we must recognize that the Famine is being mobilized by these texts in support of their own agendas, and that unless we wish to be manipulated by these agendas, we must learn to be critical in our analysis of fictional representation.[57]

The enthusiastic search for interdisciplinary and cross-media Famine source material as a refutation of the 'Famine silence' cliché is to be welcomed, but one must proceed cautiously with respect to imagery as historical evidence or an unmediated 'voice from the past'. The proximity of newspaper illustration to a textual component (within the layout of the physical page) has perhaps contributed to its cannibalization by other media that would see it as some kind of mimetic reproduction of factual truth. However, newspaper illustration is a profoundly subjective visual form, and the early date of Famine engravings – as part of a new visual medium still grappling to determine its content, form and audience – renders these representations especially open to question. Meanings generated by newspaper illustration are the outcomes of interrelated processes of image production and consumption, and to do justice to the complexity of this species their formal, material and conceptual aspects must each be interrogated. The section which follows seeks to examine Famine-era illustrations from the *Illustrated London News* with respect to their evolving technology, their relationship with the viewer, their status as visual units within a larger textual publication, and the ideological, iconographical and representational conventions which link them to fine art practices.

Although several illustrated periodicals had attempted an entry into the

57 Christopher Morash, 'Spectres of the Famine.' *Irish Review* no. 17-18, Winter (1995-6): 74–9. See also Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*; George Cusack and Sarah Goss, eds., *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006); Corporaal, Cusack, and Janssen, eds., *Recollecting Hunger*.

competitive Victorian news market, none met lasting success until the launch of the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) in 1842.[58] The remarkable innovations of the *ILN* in the realm of production, marketing and distribution helped to make it the most widely-known illustrated publication of the nineteenth century in both England and Ireland, a distinction which continues to the present day. By 1863 circulation had peaked at over 300,000 copies, and its successful format was copied by a slew of imitators. As one of the first periodicals to prioritize illustration over text,[59] it championed the visual as an unassailable and unique conveyor of truth, and ceaselessly promoted itself as the medium poised to deliver this intellectual and spiritual manna to the masses:

> Art – as now fostered, and redundant in the peculiar and facile department of wood engraving – has, in fact, become the bride of literature; genius has taken her as its handmaid; and popularity has crowned her with laurels that only seem to grow the greener the longer they are worn.[60]

The premise of the publication was to offer richly illustrated, varied news reports that ran the gamut from Parliamentary proceedings to scientific experiments to royal balls and pageants. The newspaper prided itself on the vast scope of subject material under its gaze, dispatching reporters and artists to exotic locations and loudly extolling its virtue in doing so. During a period when many publishers considered themselves not simply as purveyors of the news but as philanthropists and social crusaders, their mission to the public was keenly felt and floridly stated, as in the first edition of the *Illustrated London News:*

> Here we make our bow, determined to pursue our great experiment with boldness; to associate its principle with a purity of tone that may secure and hold fast for our journal the fearless patronage of families; to see in all things to uphold the great cause of public morality; to keep continually before the eye of the world a living and moving panorama of all its actions and influences; and to withhold from society no point that its literature can furnish or its art adorn, so long as the genius

58 The other great illustrated publishing success of the early nineteenth century was *The Penny Magazine*, founded by the philanthropist Charles Knight in 1832, although its folding in 1845 limits its usefulness for discussing the Famine period. Similarly, the major Irish illustrated periodical *The Irish Penny Magazine* ceased publication in 1846; in any case its format rarely dealt with contemporary news items.

59 Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader : A Social History of the Mass Reading Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 244.

60 *Illustrated London News*, 14 May 1842.

> of that literature and the spirit of that art, can be brought within the reach and compass of the Editors of the Illustrated London News![61]

The reference to a family audience and the cause of public morality set the tone for the types of illustrations that would grace the pages of the periodical, and served to distinguish the paper from its chief competitors in the mass market: the cheap penny weekly (like its immediate predecessor *The Penny Magazine*) or more serious daily broadsheets like *The Times*. The selectivity of imagery found in the pages of the illustrated periodical was frankly acknowledged, even celebrated, as a hallmark of responsible journalism: 'The literature – the customs – the dress – say, the institutions and localities of other lands, shall be brought home to you with spirit, with fidelity, and, we hope, with discretion and taste.'[62] The unbounded exuberance of the *ILN* in its vision of a new form of journalism combining art, news and moral edification culminated in a publication that conformed to the tastes of a staunchly middle-class audience, yet the newness of the medium allowed considerable room for experimentation by its stable of mostly anonymous writers and artists. A single feature might combine straight reportage, a poetic ode to the event, and a dramatic and engaging illustration of the principal protagonists. In the case of Ireland, this format might hold true whether the subject of the piece was a simple travel narrative or, in keeping in line with the *ILN*'s interest in social reform, the Famine.

Margaret Crawford's essay concerning the illustrations of the Famine found in the *ILN* constitutes one of the few extended art historical explorations of these printed images.[63] She records over forty illustrations of the Famine appearing between 1846 and 1850, with only one identifiable artist and two engravers. Crawford asserts in her examination of *ILN* engravings that 'a precise representation of Famine was less important than the overall atmosphere of misery that the engravings were seeking to portray'[64]; she also points to the necessity of the written word which 'conditioned the response of readers to the visual image', and to the symbolic

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Margaret Crawford, 'The Great Irish Famine 1845-9: Image Versus Reality.' In *Ireland: Art into History*, ed. Raymond Gillespie and Brian P. Kennedy (Dublin: Town House, 1994), 75–88. See also Leslie Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, the British Press, and the Irish Famine: Killing Remarks* (Burlington VT: Routledge, 2003); Julian Campbell, 'The Artist as Witness: James Mahony.' In *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, ed. John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 473–5. Useful also for its extensive illustrations (though with limited text) is Peter Murray, 'Representations of Ireland in the *Illustrated London News*.' In *Whipping the Herring*, ed. Peter Murray (Cork: Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2006), 230–53.

64 Crawford, 'The Great Irish Famine,' 82.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.
SKETCHES IN THE WEST OF IRELAND.—BY MR. JAMES MAHONY.
THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.
SKETCHES IN THE WEST OF IRELAND.—BY MR. JAMES MAHONY.

Figure 2.7 'Sketches in the West of Ireland', *Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

use of elements which suggested rather than documented starvation and its effects. Illustrations of Famine experiences, along Crawford's line of argument, are thus highly subjective, 'convincing without being objectively realistic', and fundamentally different from such sources as 'a file of state papers, the contents of a Poor Law minute book, or a doctor's case notes'. Her explanation of the sanitization of Famine scenes by *ILN* artists appeals to the combined rationale of artistic licence, the conscious or unconscious 'filter of the artist's imagination', and the suggestion that 'what an artist perceives at any given time is conditioned by experience and purpose rather than by his/her mental mirror of the scene.'[65]

As opposed to Crawford's privileging of the artist's prerogative, others have argued persuasively that periodical illustration, particularly that of the *ILN*, involved so many agents of production (artist, engraver, editor, printer, etc.) that it is inaccurate to truly speak of a singular 'artist' in reference to these visual productions and, by extension, a mistake to argue for the value of artistic

65 Ibid., 87–8.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.
SKETCHES IN THE WEST OF IRELAND.—BY MR. JAMES MAHONY.
THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.
SKETCHES IN THE WEST OF IRELAND.—BY MR. JAMES MAHONY.

Figure 2.8 'Sketches in the West of Ireland', *Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

'intent' as usually understood by art historians.[66] In examining illustration as a cultural production, Peter Sinnema's work on *ILN* engravings posits the newspaper as 'a singular discursive practice, active in the production of truth(s), and engaged with a complex array of other discourses at the mid-nineteenth century'. He goes on to suggest a mode of inquiry that takes into account the *ILN* as 'vitally productive of, as well as constituted in, ideology'[67], and provides a bridge to a politicized understanding of Famine visuality situated within mid-nineteenth-century material culture. This approach acknowledges the reciprocity of the image/audience relationship, and further allows for the construction of the Famine image not only by the artist, but also by the viewer, through the act of looking.

66 See Celina Fox, 'The Development of Social Reportage in English Periodical Illustration During the 1840s and Early 1850s.' *Past & Present* 74 (1977): 90–111; Peter W. Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page: Representing the Nation in the Illustrated London News* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, 'Civic Picturing vs. Realist Photojournalism the Regime of Illustrated News, 1856-1901.' *Design Issues* 16, no. 1, Spring (2000): 59–79.

67 Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page*, 2.

The serial form of the newspaper means that its content and identity can be interpreted diachronically (over time) or synchronically (via the single issue). This formal quality has implications not only with regard to the interpretation of illustrations, but also in the way forces within the marketplace (i.e. the demands of its collective viewers) determine content. The requirement of the periodical (as constructed over time) to maintain an overall consistency and identity is thus wrapped up with its creation of a readership. The positioning it adopts through its manipulation of 'price, content, form, and tone'[68] represents an ongoing negotiation with the reader: it is in this sense that we may understand the periodical as a special visual form created *by* the audience and not simply *for* it. While the same argument might be pursued for oil painting (similarly affected by the ebbs and flows of the art market and the demands of patronage), the newspaper's constant shifting to these forces renders them more immediately palpable.

In nearly every modern usage of *ILN* engravings as illustration for popular and academic texts, these images are extracted and reproduced singly, losing any sense of scale and relationship with one another as established by their initial publication in the newspaper. An analysis of one of these 'despatches from Ireland', considered holistically, may go some way towards rectifying this imbalance in Famine visual history and highlight the interpretative consequences of such adaptations. The principal Irish correspondent-artist for the *ILN* in the first decades of its publication was the Cork-born James Mahony (1810-79), author and illustrator of one of the best known 'Famine features': 'Sketches in the West of Ireland', which appeared in two parts in February 1847. The format of both segments is a full-sheet, two-page facing spread (Fig. 2.7, 2.8). In the case of the 13 February issue, seven engravings are featured. The size of the standard *ILN* sheet measures 45 × 27.5 cm and generally contains three columns, each approximately 8 cm in width. The layout of the pages carefully balances images and text: two large, identically centred illustrations anchor each page ('Old Chapel Lane, Skibbereen' and 'Skibbereen, from Clover-Hill', 14.5 × 24 cm and 12.5 × 24 cm, Fig. 2.9, 2.10). The smaller illustrations inserted at the top and bottom of each page counter-balance each other, and create visual consistency within the article's spread, whilst the two largest illustrations both offer broad views of a main road into town. Beginning on the fourth page of the issue, the engravings dominate the page and the technique of the double-spread signal it as an important despatch.

The 20 February issue (Fig. 2.8) features a similar layout, though it contains five large engravings and only half as much text. Two-part

68 Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre.' In *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990), 19–32.

Figure 2.9 James Mahony, 'Old Chapel Lane, Skibbereen', *Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

articles are rather exceptional in the pages of the *ILN*; with the frequent reporting on Famine conditions in non-illustrated sections and weekly reports concerning Parliamentary debates on Ireland, it is perhaps not surprising the editors considered the subject of interest to its reading audience and worthy of larger expression. Nevertheless, the newspaper's still-evolving (and at times, haphazard) approach to page design and layout is evident in the double spread of the 20 February issue, which ends abruptly midway through the second page; the remaining page space is taken up with an illustration related to a story beginning on the following page ('The Royal Society – The Marquis of Northampton's Conversazione'). The illustration, an interior drawing of a large, formally-clad crowd attending a grand soiree held at the Marquis' palatial residence, is in stark contrast with the representations of extreme poverty it faces. The out-of-place engraving simply fit the space available, trumping consideration of appropriate narrative or visual correlation, and further delivered on the paper's promise of variety and kaleidoscopic coverage.

Most significant are the compositions of the engravings themselves, particularly through choice of subject and style, and the interpretive function of the text framing their consumption by the reader/viewer. The conscription of Famine journalism within familiar rhetorical modes is evident from the poetic lament that opens the news report of 13 February:

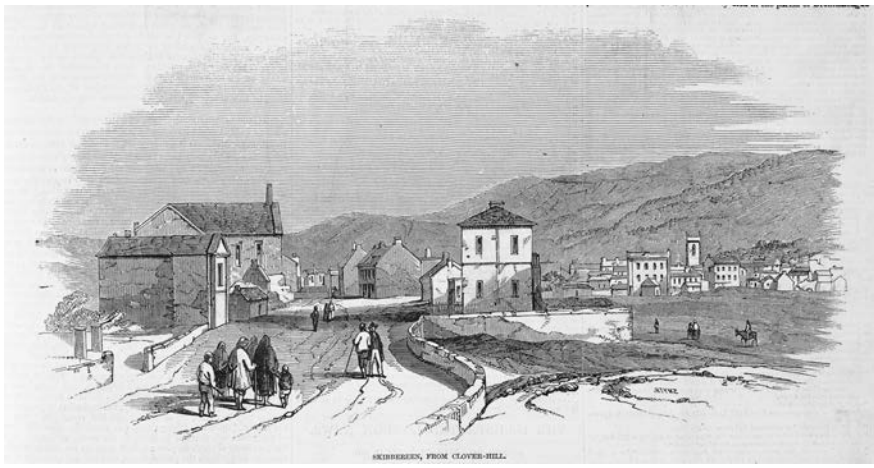


Figure 2.10 James Mahony, 'Skibbereen, from Clover Hill', *Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

> Uncoffin'd, unshrouded, his bleak corpse they bore,
> From the spot where he died on the cabin's wet floor,
> To a hole which they dug in the garden close by;
> Thus a brother hath died – thus a Christian must lie!
>
> 'Twas a horrible end and a harrowing tale,
> To chill the strong heart – to strike revelry pale.
> No disease o'er this Victim could mastery claim,
> 'Twas Famine alone mark'd his skeleton frame![69]

This Gothic and macabre narration immediately frames the article as a dramatic encounter, reminiscent of MacDonald's melodramatic staging of *The Discovery of the Potato Blight*. The text that follows is structured as a narrative journey, allegedly in Mahony's own words, though not without uneasy overtones of ghoulish spectacle. A preface to Mahony's account offers the rationale for the assignment:

> The accounts from the Irish provincial papers continue to detail the unmitigated sufferings of the starving peasantry [...] With the object of ascertaining the accuracy of the frightful statements received from

69 James Mahony, 'Sketches in the West of Ireland.' *The Illustrated London News* (London), 13-20 February 1847. Poem credited to C.C.T.

Figure 2.11
James Mahony, 'Woman Begging at Clonakilty', *Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Figure 2.12
James Mahony, 'Boy and Girl at Cahera', *Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

> the West, and of placing them in unexaggerated fidelity before our readers, a few days since, we commissioned our Artist, Mr. James Mahoney, of Cork, to visit a seat of extreme suffering, viz., Skibbereen and its vicinity; and we now submit to our readers the graphic results of his journey, accompanied by such descriptive notes as he was enabled to collect whilst sketching the fearful incidents and desolate localities; premising merely, that our Artist must already have been somewhat familiar with such scenes of suffering in his own locality, (Cork), so that he cannot be supposed to have taken an extreme view of the greater misery at Skibbereen.[70]

This language of legitimization is a common feature of *ILN* reports, providing an assurance to the reader of both the veracity of the report and the credentials of the author. Anxiety related to the perception of authenticity is discernable, and may represent the *ILN*'s attempt to reconcile the two antagonistic concepts of 'Art' and 'Truth' while granting its readers the individual pleasures of both.

The *ILN* fashioned itself as the democratic conduit of art and knowledge, making available to the middle-class reader what was hitherto the realm of the privately wealthy and classically educated. The paradox of this promise was that in order to preserve the 'aura' of art and hence its desirability, its authenticity as a unique object had to be defended. Clearly this was to prove problematic for an object defined by, and indeed celebrated for, its mass reproduction: how could each individual reader equally possess the original object? Although *ILN* issues were offered by the publisher as 'collectible' items to be retained, bound and re-read, the mere fact of possession was insufficient to confer the elevated state of authenticity articulated in the text. The *ILN*'s solution to this dilemma was to remove the mark of authenticity from the physical object itself (the newspaper) and relocate it in the intangible idea of the original creation (i.e. the artist's 'true' sketch made on the spot). The vigorous defence of artistic fidelity found in the rhetoric of *ILN* prefaces and editorials thus works to reaffirm its cultural authority and desirability in the wake of disturbances roused by its technology.

The article's preface further carries the implication that visual evidence is somehow more persuasive than textual description, as if engravings of the Famine would convince viewers of the desperate situation where text did not suffice. As Celina Fox's study of illustrated social reportage in the 1840s notes, however, engraved reports did not always possess impeccable claims to accuracy; additionally, they rarely escaped criticism when imagery was

70 Ibid.

deemed overly explicit.[71] While it may be impossible to discern the precise accuracy of Mahony's engravings, to what extent do they reflect the text? Is the claim of 'unexaggerated fidelity' and the implied objectivity of the images a reality? The articles feature two images frequently reproduced in twentieth-century commemorative material – 'Woman begging at Clonakilty' (13 Feb., Fig 2.11) and 'Boy and Girl at Cahera' (20 Feb., Fig. 2.12). In each, the isolated subject gazes directly at the viewer, forcing a discomforting confrontation: in the case of the Clonakilty woman, she entreats the viewer/author for money to bury the dead child she holds in her arms; the boy at Cahera stares out with a haggard and gaunt expression, as he and the girl beside him scratch at the ground for food. The emotion is unequivocal, the renderings iconic and reliant on the evocation of women's and children's suffering, and the graphic style (consisting of strong light/dark contrasts and simplified compositions) renders them easily readable.

Of the ten remaining illustrations, only two directly feature clear representations of the suffering Mahony floridly describes ('Funeral at Shepperton Lakes' and 'Mullin's Hut, at Scull'). Three others feature exterior representations of dwellings ('The Hut or Watch-House in the Old Chapel Yard', 'Harrington's Hut', and 'The Village of Mienies') that are associated with horrific scenes either witnessed by or told to Mahony, but are related only through narrative and not in evidence visually. The other five illustrations are views of villages set into the landscape, one of which ('Old Chapel Lane', Fig. 2.9) suggests the desolation of the locale through crumbling buildings, an overturned cart, and a funeral procession with coffin, but on the whole are incongruous with the gruesome text and descriptions like 'abode of death' and 'filthy sepulchre'. Furthermore, the inclusion of extraneous details and expanded perspective mutes the emotional impact of such scenes, and robs them of their ability to transfer well as purely visual pieces without their textual component.

With the two most affecting images considerably outnumbered and outsized by 'scenic views', the evincing of an emotional response to these articles is almost entirely reliant on the narrative, with the images functioning primarily as triggers for the reader's imagination. Textually, the *ILN* engulfs a 'pure' visuality and circumscribes it within language: the ravaging of a man's corpse by dogs is shocking enough to be featured in both segments of the article, and the description by Dr Donovan (Mahony's guide in the region) is graphically retold:

> A man by the name of Leahey died in the parish of Dromdeleague about a fortnight ago; his wife and two children remained in the house until the putrescent exhalations from the body drove them from the

71 Fox, 'The Development of Social Reportage,' 90.

Figure 2.13 James Mahony, 'Village of Mienies', *Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1847
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

> companionship with the dead; in a day or two after, some persons in passing the man's cabin, had their attention attracted by a loud snarling, and on entering, found the gnawed and mangled skeleton of Leahey contended for by hungry dogs.[72]

The sketch accompanying this tale (a bare rendering of the exterior of the cottage with two impoverished figures adjacent, Fig. 2.13) leaves the reader to imagine the scene as played out within the crumbling structure; the viewer escapes a visual assault and responds with an indignant imagination, the sensibilities of the audience simultaneously offended and protected.

While this distance might seem at odds with the exhortation to witness, acknowledge and reform, it is in line with the author's own conflicted reaction to those he encounters, and the perennial difficulty of self-definition in relation to the subject of the Famine. In this same article Dr Donovan begs Mahony 'not to go into the house, and to avoid coming into contact with the people surrounding the doorway' of a dwelling where people lay

72 Qtd. From Dr Donovan's Diary, orig. published in the *Cork Southern Reporter*, 26 January 1847, reprinted in Mahony, *Illustrated London News*, 13-20 February 1847.

Figure 2.14 'Bridget O'Donnel and Children', *Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1849 Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Figure 2.15 'Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field', *Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1849 Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

dying; in another instance, Mahony confirms that to complete his sketch 'he was compelled to stand up to his ankles in the dirt and filth upon the floor.' Melissa Fegan, in her analysis of Famine travelogues, suggests that the discomfort of the voyeuristic position was mollified by the transferral of victimhood from the observed to the observer, the tourist 'traumatized and haunted by starvation [...] displaced and effaced the nameless sufferers'.[73] This reversal of perspective enacted by the viewer, the switch from an outwardly radiating sympathy to inward-facing 'traumatic' experience, is already familiar from the Ruskin passage referenced earlier with respect to the ethical picturesque. Curiously, the technique employed to visually establish

73 Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Great Irish Famine 1845-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 98.

a comfortable viewer-subject distance opposes its linguistic counterpart: pictorial restraint and ambiguity contrast with gruesome written detail. The visual experience is described as so overwhelming that 'neither pen nor pencil ever could portray the misery and horror', yet subsequent verbalizations (if not visualizations) are unrelenting in their detail.

In effect, the newspaper's rhetorical codes can be equated with conventions of visual representation, like the picturesque or sentimentalism, which govern perception between viewer and subject – affirming the socially acceptable orientation of the *ILN* reader towards the Famine victim and creating appropriate and familiar conditions for the expression of benevolent feelings. In this instance, the evocation of reader emotion was intended to provoke not merely detached sympathy, but charitable response:

> We resume from our Journal of last week our Artist's Sketches of Scenes and Incidents from the distressed district of Skibbereen, and its neighbourhood; premising that our main object in the publication of this Series of Illustrations is to direct public sympathy to the suffering poor of these localities, a result that must, inevitably, follow the right appreciation of their extent and severity [...] I entreat you to do the best you can for so much suffering humanity; as this visit to the West will, I trust, assist in making this affliction known to the charitable public.[74]

Yet the intent of these articles to motivate charitable action limits the modes of representation possible: too graphic an image, and the viewer moves quickly past pity or sympathy to disgust. Far from a simple exchange of funds from wealthy to poor, the codes of charitable intent and action are inextricably constituted in the ideological system inhabited and imposed by the donor. As Margaret Kelleher has noted, 'the relationship of famine victim and potential donor emerges, not as a simple form of superiority, but as a complex form of interdependence.'[75] John Barrell's declaration that the 'act of benevolence is itself an act of repression'[76] underlines the distinction upheld during the Famine that two categories of the needy existed: the deserving and undeserving poor.[77] With women and children usually falling into the first category, it is not

74 *Illustrated London News*, 20 Feb. 1847.

75 Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, 54.

76 Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 82.

77 Often the most oppressive forms of relief during the Famine were defined by this distinction, in particular the Poor Law of 1838 and the workhouse system derived from it. See Christine Kinealy, 'Potatoes, Providence, and Philanthropy: The Role of Private Charity during the Irish Famine.' In *The Irish World Wide: Vol. 6: The Meaning of the Famine*, ed. Patrick O'Sullivan (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 140–71; Tim P. O'Neill, 'The Charities and Famine in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland.' In *Luxury*

Figure 2.16 'Miss Kennedy Distributing Clothes at Kilrush', *Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1849
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

surprising to find they predominate Famine engravings where human figures are foregrounded, as with the two possibly most well-known and reproduced Famine images, 'Bridget O'Donnel and Children' and 'Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field' (both from 22 December 1849, Figs. 2.14-2.15). The subsequent popularity of the Bridget O'Donnel image in particular is striking, as it is by far the most frequently reproduced Famine image in the twentieth century.[78] Although the personification of 'mother Ireland' by way of female allegory recurs throughout Irish visual history (whether embodied as 'Erin' or, in post-independence Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan) the powerful resonance of the starving mother image is attached to the particular horror and moral outrage provoked by the maternal failure to provide for her children. As the ultimate emblem of social collapse (drawn also in the subject of the fallen

and Austerity, ed. Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999), 137–64; Peter Gray, 'National Humiliation and the Great Hunger: Fast and Famine in 1847.' *Irish Historical Studies* 32, no. 126 November (2000): 193–216.

78 Apart from the image's frequent reproduction in print and online media, replicas may also be found in at least a dozen twentieth-century memorial projects, including Famine monuments in Roscommon, Dublin, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Cleveland.

ingénue or compromised female so popular in Victorian painting[79]) the image of the abject mother 'releases a threat which exceeds anything the political or economic register may contain'[80]; poverty personified through the female/child body indicates the highly gendered construction of Famine iconography and, indeed, that of the Irish nation itself.[81]

The discomforting representation of hungry women and children, opportunity for social recognition afforded to charitable donors, colonial context of philanthropic efforts, and complex exchange between text and image is nowhere better encapsulated than in an image featured in a subsequent *ILN* 'Famine feature' of 1849-50 depicting the child of British officer (and Poor Law Inspector) Captain Kennedy distributing relief to the poor of Kilrush (Fig. 2.16):

> Another Sketch follows (of Miss Kennedy), which shows that, amidst this world of wretchedness, all is not misery and guilt […] She is represented as engaged in her daily occupation of distributing clothing to the wretched children brought around her by their more wretched parents. In the front of the group I noticed one woman crouching like a monkey, and drawing around her the only rag she had left to conceal her nudity. A big tear was rolling down her cheek, with gratitude for the gifts the innocent child was distributing […] The Sketch will, I hope, immortalize the beneficent child, who is filling the place of a saint, and performing the duties of a patriot.[82]

Whilst these later series of articles are more exacting in detail, comment and illustration, their images are also clearly problematic in the animalization of the poor (here verbalized as a 'woman crouching like a monkey') and artistic tendencies to place the poor in dramatic, sublime landscapes and poses at the mercy of external altruistic intervention.

As Lyn Pykett has observed, the immediate success and public approbation necessary for the survival of the Victorian periodical press in a competitive marketplace ensured that the views expressed in its pages would always be skewed to 'patronise the opinions which are now in vogue, the opinions of those who are now in power'.[83] Though this assertion may not be precise

79 Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 24.

80 Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, 74.

81 On the subject of gender, Irish nationhood, Famine and modernity see also 'Hungry Ghosts and Hungry Women.' In McLean, *The Event and its Terrors*, 129–50.

82 *Illustrated London News*, 22 Dec. 1849.

83 Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context.' In *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990), 3–18.

for each individual article, this imperative certainly proscribed the range of meanings possible within the framework of the periodical as a whole. Despite the verbosely moralistic paper's avowed mission to 'plunge into the great ocean of human affairs', as a relatively young publication in the Famine period, solidifying its readership and creating a unique identity for itself within the middle-class market, the *ILN* could not afford to alienate or overly shock its readership with graphic (and hence brutally realistic) imagery. Where shock resides there is always an element to counteract it, a way to resolve viewer unease or distaste into a more pleasurable emotional activity, such as the charitable exchange or the activity of spectatorship. Thus, despite the frequent use of *ILN* engravings to illustrate more recent Famine histories based on documentary resources, the visual record of the Famine is fraught with inconsistencies, limited by imposed standards of taste and the unequal relationship between viewer and subject, and affected by the hybridized visual/textual experimentation of this emergent journalistic form. It would be an overstatement to assert that all forms of illustrated social reportage during the Famine operated under the same limitations at work in *ILN*; indeed, the *ILN* itself was frequently inconsistent in its reporting of the Irish situation.[84] However, recognition that enormous limitations on image-making did in fact exist, and left an immutable mark on periodical illustrations, surely cautions us to be more sceptical in our subsequent encounters with them.

Legacy

An anomaly evident throughout the examples discussed thus far is the identity of the viewer: with some exceptions, very few nineteenth-century Famine-related pictures of the Irish were executed with the Irish viewer exclusively in mind. As nearly all of these artistic works existed as products in the commercial marketplace (whether or not they proved ultimately profitable), they all pander at some level to the sensibilities of the contemporary British audience, around whom that marketplace revolved.[85] Hence,

84 Consider, for example, a highly romantic full-page engraving of St Patrick's Day on 13 March 1847 (also by James Mahony) that combines (in ekphratic description, ballad and image) sympathy for the Famine, a virulent condemnation of intemperance, and an illustration of the amazement of the 'aborigines' of Ireland at the advent of St. Patrick. In the same issue appeared a report entitled 'The Progress of Starvation' and another documenting an incident of food theft in Rosscarbery, Co. Cork that resulted in the beheading of two children.

85 As Bhreathnach-Lynch notes, the small Irish domestic market was equally influenced by British tastes and bound by class differences, which viewed 'the peasant "other" through the ideological framework of class.' Bhreathnach-Lynch, 'Framing the Irish', 259–61.

Figure 2.17 *Mural,* Whiterock Road, Ballymurphy, Belfast
Photograph by author (June 2003); no longer extant

despite Nicol's close interaction with Famine-era Ireland, we see not pictures of agrarian unrest or gruesome suffering, but character studies and dramatic vignettes; Watts allegorizes; and MacDonald offers picturesque melodrama. The *Illustrated London News* wavers on 'the Irish Question' and opts for moral (over political) outrage and the safer waters of charitable response, but its images also conform to viewer expectation, and hardly bear the mark of radical social realist journalism and illustration exemplified a few decades later with the advent of *The Graphic* in 1869.

It is pertinent to return now to a question posed in the introduction: the recurrence of nineteenth-century images in the sesquicentennial commemorations. Catherine Marshall is correct in highlighting representations from the *Illustrated London News* as the most familiar of these images, and this has proved true across media: a glance though any Famine-related historical (popular or academic) work of the last decade validates this observation. The first edition of Cecil Woodham-Smith's history *The Great Hunger* (1962), still

Figure 2.18 *Mural,* Ardoyne Ave Belfast
Photograph courtesy of Dr Jonathan McCormick (2002); no longer extant

the best-selling Irish history book of all time, was entirely illustrated with engraving reproductions (save for a few portraits). Certainly the black-and-white, graphic simplicity of such engravings make them easy (and cheap) to reproduce; they also manage to convey emotion without the formal trappings of sentimentality worn heavily by their painted counterparts, even as they closely share modes of representing the Irish subject. Yet it is important to re-emphasize that reliance on a small body of Famine engravings familiar through repetition is more revealing of commemorative organizations' own preoccupations and concerns than it is reflective of those engravings' reliability or 'authenticity' as visual records. Engravings like 'Woman at Clonakilty' or 'Boy and Girl at Cahera' may resonate where 'Mullin's Hut' does not, yet all are constrained by the technology and conventions of their making, and remain equally vulnerable to ideological appropriation.

Instances of the modern reproduction and creative translation of these *ILN* images can be found in a diverse range of media, including public murals in Belfast[86] (Figs. 2.17-2.18), political cartoons (Fig. 2.19), and

86 At least four murals have copied *ILN* engravings, though they are subject to frequent erasure and overpainting. Jonathan McCormick has compiled an online directory of approximately 2,000 entries on Northern Irish murals, including photographs, my

Figure 2.19
Caricature of Bertie Ahern as 'Bridget O'Donnel' by Wendy Shea *Sunday Independent*, 22 October 1995 (accompanying article 'A Famine Feast of Self-Righteousness' by Conor Cruise O'Brien)

contemporary art,[87] where the source material is usually deemed familiar enough not to require referencing. These contemporary usages may invent narratives from these images (one mural in west Belfast combined various engravings, disparate in time and attribution, to create a linear account of eviction, Fig. 2.18), or utilize them as the basis for new two- and three-dimensional renderings (as is the case with numerous commemorative monuments, Fig. 2.20). Yet the continued publication and usage of *ILN* engravings as single images fractures their initial existence as part of a

thanks for his assistance in tracking Famine-themed murals: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/mccormick/.

87 In his work 'Pages from Irish History', exhibited in Kilmainham Gaol as part of the 1991 site-based installation project *In a State*, artist Robert Ballagh reworked an image from the *ILN,* re-captioning it 'In 1847, Two Irish Peasants Discuss the Benefits of a Low Starch Diet'.

Figure 2.20
Detail, *The Irish Memorial*, Glenna Goodacre, Philadelphia (2003)
'Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field', *Illustrated London News*, 22 December 1849

more complex narrative; it divorces them from their historical, political and aesthetic contexts and in so doing allows them to absorb the projections of new ideologies without protest. The ubiquity of their use as illustrations for histories, no matter how divergent those same histories might be in their own perspectives and conclusions, demonstrates how orphaned these pictures have become. The danger in all this, of course, is that over time the conditions of their creation, and hence an acknowledgment of their subjectivity and limitations, is lost. If we seek to understand the Famine by looking at these images in isolation, we will come away with a very poor understanding indeed.

The replication and creative reinterpretation of Famine-related images further demonstrates the inversion of relationship that has occurred in the modern period between viewer and subject: no longer do we wish to stay outside that cottage door, or maintain a distance from the Famine sufferer. Urging a considered and self-reflexive response to images of the poor within eighteenth-century landscape painting, John Barrell has averred that for the modern viewer 'to identify with the exhausted and underfed labourer is impossible [...] and would be insulting if it were not.'[88] However, sentiments expressed during the 150th commemorations frequently contradict such a position entirely – asserting that kinship, not merely knowledge, should guide our response to and re-use of historical visualizations. As Catherine Marshall remarked with respect to an exhibition staged at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1998 (incorporating both historical and contemporary depictions/responses to Famine):

> For well over a century the horror of the event and the guilt of the survivors meant that the Famine was rarely represented visually. Only now is it possible to claim the dead as ours [...][89]

In his analysis of Erskine Nicol's painting *The Tenant* (which appeared on the cover of the *Éire-Ireland* issue marking the 150th anniversary), historian Kevin Whelan likewise proposed that its interpretation offered another means of 'grasping the famine at a human level', or a way to 'reappropriate that buried experience'.[90] The imperative to 'reclaim' the Famine victim from a disinterested and distanced history is one which came to permeate the discourse of the 150th anniversary commemorations; seeing in the Famine sufferer 'a vision of ourselves' would prove a compelling if deeply conflicted act of empathetical identification.

The polar reactions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century consumers of Famine images might be construed as two extremes of viewer-subject identification; however, neither offers an adequate resolution to the anxieties provoked by a spectacular and restive relationship to the subject of the Famine. Twentieth-century commemorations, as subsequent chapters will explore, have operated under many of the same constraints at work in the nineteenth century: the privileged subjectivity of the viewer of Famine images is not a phenomenon isolated to an anachronistic Victorian audience, nor has the Famine's visual syntax lessened in potency or fluidity across purpose.

88 Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 5.

89 Irish Museum of Modern Art, *Representations of the Famine at the Irish Museum of Modern Art* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1998), press release.

90 Kevin Whelan, 'Immoral Economy: Interpreting Erskine Nicol's *The Tenant*.' *Éire-Ireland* 32, Spring (1997): 151–5.

3
Commemorating the Famine: 1940s–1990s

If the visual record of the Famine from the nineteenth century awaits wider recognition and exposition, there is no doubt its visual representation fell sharply from the public eye with the onset of the twentieth.[1] As the Famine moved from direct experience to received memory, a consistent and defined space within the public sphere of memory, Irish visual culture and commemoration failed to coalesce until the 1990s. Although this chapter is largely concerned with the historical, social and political circumstances of Famine memory's revival during its sesquicentenary and beyond, some initial reflections on its public memorialization prior to the 1990s are warranted.

Given the Famine's catastrophic impact on Irish society, its relatively minor early role within Irish historical studies, popular commemoration and public discourse has contributed to widespread proclamations of 'silence' as a prevailing cultural response. However, much recent scholarship has refuted notions that Famine memory lay dormant prior to the sesquicentennial, identifying strong undercurrents of Famine memory within Irish folklore records, popular literature and both native and diasporic political activity, from the 1850s through to the present.[2] Certainly the copious recollections recorded by the Irish Folklore Commission (collected in the 1930s and 40s)

1 Within fine art practice, the forging of a new, confident visual genealogy of the nation coinciding with the cause of Irish independence – epitomized by the Irish Cultural Revival – preoccupied artists concerned with domestic and political subjects. Representations of (or meditations on) the Famine during the early-mid twentieth century are few in number, though not absent: exhibitions documenting such works include *Exhibition of Pictures of Irish Historical Interest* (National College of Art and Design, 1946), *Famine* (George Moore Society, 1995), and *Representations of the Famine* (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1998).

2 The rise of cross-disciplinary critical perspectives, expansion of memory 'sources' and heightened attention to the epistemology of memory distinguish recent studies of pre-1990s Famine memory, including McMahon, 'Ports of Recall'; David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Corporaal, Cusack, and Janssen, eds., *Recollecting Hunger.*

provide evidence of extensive private memories of the Famine; furthermore, as Mary Daly has noted, the Famine never wholly disappeared as a point of reference within Irish political rhetoric, suggesting that 'a common knowledge and understanding of that event among Irish people' remained active at least until the 1960s.[3] The Famine's consequences for the emergent Irish state and Irish communities abroad at the dawn of the twentieth century have been widely examined from the standpoint of social, economic and political change;[4] and its manifestations within myriad forms of popular and official memory from the 1850s to the 1940s – though at times fragmented, partial and oblique – have drawn increasing attention:

> The after-effects of the Famine emerge not so much in recurrent hunger or in explicit recollection as in the phenomena that it inaugurates, such as mass emigration. The Famine reappears as a kind of displaced memory that haunts the afterlife of Irish culture, not directly but in images and tropes that form its traces.[5]

Accordingly, the notion that the Famine was 'forgotten' in popular or public discourse must be countered with clear evidence of its imprint across a wide range of cultural representations, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and perhaps most palpably in the diaspora, where the memory of Famine proved formative in constructions of collective identity.[6] Although the 1990s undoubtedly constituted a watershed for Famine memory's public visibility, the ebbs and flows of its earlier presence – and the political and social reasons influencing its expression – remain a subject now receiving (and still deserving) wider excavation, analysis and comparative perspective.

Nevertheless, it remains true that organized, 'official' commemorative activity squarely centred on the Famine only sporadically and unevenly

3 Daly, 'Forty Shades of Grey?,' 99.

4 A useful summary of this historiography may be found in John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy, eds., *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, Introduction.

5 Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 6.

6 See 'Constructing the Memory of the Famine, 1850-1900.' In Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, 209–45. Over the past decade several recent major exhibitions have also borne witness to the influence of Famine memory on diasporic cultural and identity constructions in a variety of media: *Éire|Land* (McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College: 2003); *Exiles and Emigrants: Epic Journeys to Australia in the Victorian Era* (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne: 2006); *Being Irish O'Quebec* (McCord Museum, Quebec: 2009-10); *Not Just Ned: A True History of the Irish in Australia* (National Museum of Australia, Canberra: 2011-12); and the opening of Ireland's Great Hunger Museum, Músaem an Ghorta Mhóir (Quinnipiac University, Connecticut: 2012).

occurred prior to the 1990s, particularly on the monumental front. Most pre-1990s monumental commemorations were confined to modest local graveyard markings and smaller community memorials dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (with very few nationally or regionally scaled initiatives), and for the most part these acts of memory remained locally isolated rather than part of any shared 'commemorative consciousness' as such. Although instances of longer public traditions of Famine remembrance may be identified – particularly in Canada, where various nineteenth- and early twentieth-century crosses erected on quarantine islands and the 1859 'Black Rock' memorial in Montreal have received ongoing commemoration[7] – not until the late twentieth century did the Famine receive any level of commemoration approximating that of 1798 or 1916. Earlier public artworks (not strictly constructed as memorials) addressing the subject of the Famine are even rarer. Perhaps the best-known example is Edward Delaney's *Famine* sculptural group on St Stephen's Green, Dublin (1967) (Fig. 3.1), but most artistic engagements (as with Delaney's) have been limited to private meditations, and are not the consequence of collective activity.[8]

Perhaps surprisingly, the centenary of the Famine in the mid-1940s did little to reverse muted interest in its public commemoration. In Ireland, apart from the commissioning of a major scholarly historical volume and the important Irish Folklore Commission survey on the Famine undertaken from 1944-5,[9] the 100th anniversary passed with little official or popular acknowledgment.[10] Although the subdued Irish governmental recognition of this anniversary has since drawn the opprobrium of some 1990s commen-

7 See Chapter 5.

8 Delaney's Famine group formed part of his Wolfe Tone monument (not a separately commissioned piece); his concurrent Dublin monument to Thomas Davis (1966) also included Famine-themes panels (derived from *ILN* engravings) on its base. Eamon Delaney, *Breaking the Mould: A Story of Art and Ireland* (Dublin: New Island, 2009); Roisin Kennedy, 'Searching for the Vital Form.' In *Bronzes from the Sixties: Edward Delaney* (Dublin: Royal Hibernian Academy, 2005), 7–13.

9 R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, eds., *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-52* (Dublin: Irish Committee of Historical Sciences by Browne and Nolan, 1956). On the Folklore Famine survey, see Ó Ciosáin, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive,' .

10 A few other minor initiatives did appear: the National College of Art and Design held an *Exhibition of Pictures of Irish Historical Interest* in 1946 which featured some contemporary Famine-related work alongside other historical subject pictures. See the exhibition catalogue, *Thomas Davis and the Young Ireland Movement Centenary: Exhibition of Pictures of Irish Historical Interest* (Dublin: National College of Art, 1946). Additionally, Gerard Healy's 1945 play *The Black Stranger*, addressing the subjects of Famine death, emigration and (more controversially) prostitution, was first produced and staged by the Players Theatre at the Opera House, Cork on 26 February, and later played to Dublin audiences at the Gate Theatre in March.

Figure 3.1 *Famine*, Edward Delaney, Dublin (1967)

tators, it is not difficult to imagine how a newly emergent, economically precarious independent state might have been disinclined to commemorate a devastating event whose dimensions were still not fully understood at the time.[11] Ireland's heavy economic reliance on the United Kingdom further discouraged calls for national commemorations that might have prompted the reignition of political hostilities; as former Minister of State Avril Doyle recently noted, 'I'm sure there wouldn't have been too many of them that would have wanted to rattle the cage.'[12] Indeed, the experience of the Famine hardly seemed a threat consigned to the distant past, as severe food shortages experienced in Ireland in 1946 and 1947 sparked a series of debates in the Dáil over exportation of goods from Ireland to a war-torn Europe.[13] Across the diaspora, massive programmes of post-war commemoration in the U.S., Australia, Canada and Britain eclipsed interest in the Famine anniversary, and the prospect of Famine commemorations reviving anti-British antagonisms amongst its Allies (not to mention Ireland's contentious wartime neutrality) likely did little to rouse commemorative enthusiasm.

If the Irish government made for a reluctant instigator of centenary commemorations, what of the general public? Here too little evidence of activity can be found: few memorials, pageants or parades, and only rarely did other forms of collective commemorations appear. The absence of extensive commemorative activity at the popular level has since been frequently interpreted as reluctance or overt avoidance of deep and painful Famine memories, as the elderly alive during the 1940s were often separated by only a generation or two from direct experiences of the Famine. However, the 1990s characterization of the 1940s anniversary as a psychological 'repression' of Famine memory (a view which of course privileged more contemporary, psychoanalytically 'correct' means of confronting the historical past) often failed to account for the very pragmatic reasons why the Famine failed to register on the commemorative front.

Certainly the imprecise nature of the Famine itself – its lack of central characters, linear narrative, heroic episodes or key dates – sat awkwardly with Irish traditions of both national and popular commemoration. The geographic and social imbalance of the Famine's devastation and the complexities of its legacy (still very potent in the 1940s and the source of

11 As Joe Lee has pointed out (in reference to perceptions of 1940s historians' 'silence' on the Famine), a very small number of university historians were actually working on Irish subjects at the time, and even fewer on the Famine itself. See J.J. Lee, '150 Years: The Famine.' *Irish Independent*, 19 August 1995.

12 Interview with Avril Doyle (Former Chair, Famine Commemoration Committee), 7 August 2007.

13 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Committee on Finance, Vote 72 – Alleviation of Distress* (4 July 1947), Vol. 107.

much bitterness, particularly with respect to land ownership) also rendered any form of communal agreement over its memory unlikely. In contrast, the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising in 1966 was celebrated with great fanfare and pageantry both nationally and locally;[14] not only was the commemorative subject (a revolutionary gesture) innately suited to traditional forms of celebration and heroic mythologizing, its celebration of nascent nationhood elided more comfortably with the ideological imperatives of the de Valera government. If the St Patrick's Day edition of the American magazine *Collier's* in 1951 is any indication – its cover optimistically emblazoned 'Ireland Today: From Great Famine to Great Future' – there existed considerable feeling that improvements in Ireland's economic and political condition could only be achieved through a forward-looking confidence: a future where the Famine past held little relevance.

The sidelining of Famine memory from Irish public discourse in the 1940s underscores the point that the chronological fact of a commemorative anniversary does not in itself constitute the primary catalyst for stimulating widespread interest in history or memory, and reminds us that commemorative panegyrics (or their absence) are culturally and temporally determined. Indeed, as Roy Foster has observed, while the Famine generated millions of commemorative punts and dollars in the 1990s, significant anniversaries associated with nineteenth-century heroes Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell passed with little public reaction or note.[15] Preconditions for commemoration invariably include historical distance, economic stability, and available models/modes of commemorative expression, and not until the 'Celtic Tiger' cultural and economic renaissance of the 1990s did these factors converge on the subject of the Famine. Unprecedented prosperity, intensified connection with its diaspora and the rise of global 'memory cultures' in the 1990s (remarked upon by Pierre Nora, Andreas Huyssen and many others) had an indelible impact on the scale of the Famine's commemoration, produced by an international cast of commemorationists well acquainted with techniques of mediating historical anniversaries for heritage-hungry audiences. The question of precisely how and why the Famine has assumed pride of place in Irish and diasporic collective memory, particularly since the 1990s, forms the basis of the chapter which follows – seeking to pull together the strands of modern memory which, as Nora has

14 Mary Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan, eds., *1916 in 1966: Commemorating the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007); Roisín Higgins, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012).

15 Foster, *The Irish Story*, 32–3.

described, must ultimately rely on evoking 'the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.'[16]

Commemoration and historiography

Despite their aspirations to permanence, the hundred-odd monuments now populating the Famine commemorative landscape may not constitute the 150th anniversary's most enduring productions: that distinction may very well be secured by new waves of Famine research which emerged (and continue to proliferate) at the cusp of the new century. Although several key Famine texts published in the 1980s mark the revival of Famine studies slightly earlier,[17] the public and academic appetite for historical accounts of the Famine in the 1990s created an environment of explosive growth. Though the flowering of recent Famine research has by this stage been well documented,[18] a brief overview of the unfolding historiography of the 1990s – and the accompanying debates over Famine-related historical revisionism and public history-making widely referenced throughout the commemorations – will grant context to the forms, inscriptions and narratives made visible by public projects discussed in subsequent chapters.

Alongside publication of new general and regional histories of the Famine during the 1990s appeared increasingly specialized historical works on a diverse range of Famine-related subjects. Economic analyses like Cormac Ó Gráda's *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (1999) and Joel Mokyr's earlier *Why Ireland Starved* (1983); works of political history including Peter Gray's *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society 1843-50* (1999) and Christine Kinealy's *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845-52* (1994); and emigration histories including Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles* (1985) and Donald Akenson's *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (1993) represented major new

16 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.' *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–25.

17 Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History 1900-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

18 For useful overviews of Famine historiography see James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*; Kevin Whelan, 'The Revisionist Debate in Ireland.' *boundary 2* 31, no. 1 Spring (2004): 179–205; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006); 'Introduction.' In Crowley, Smyth, and Murphy, eds., *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, xii–xvi.

re-examinations of primary sources, followed by countless other studies. Moreover, the proliferation of research has not been limited to the disciplines of history, economics and political science: new work has since emerged from the fields of psychology, geography, sociology, history of art, philosophy, literature, drama and women's studies. Many of these new studies share an interest in applying contemporary cultural theory and critical methodologies to Famine-era material, reassessing the processes of history and memory-making which have shaped our understanding of the Famine, challenging canonical interpretations of the Famine's history, re-evaluating its cultural legacy and investigating what Paul Ricoeur has termed the 'hermeneutics of the historical tradition'.[19] The signs of 'famine fatigue'[20] noted in the onslaught of commemorative activities in the 1990s seem in retrospect misjudged; two decades later, interest in the Famine (despite some inevitable cooling in the post-commemorative period) seems unlikely to abate any time soon.

The commemorations generated new awareness of underutilized Famine resources and evidence then poorly understood in Famine studies; the consequent surge in research has helped to address many gaps in its historical reckoning. However, the massing of new Famine scholarship also highlighted schisms between academics on many of the cornerstone issues of Famine history: eviction and mortality data; actual food levels during the Famine (and interpretation of import and export information); assessing geographical variation of levels of suffering; the effect of dominant political, economic and moral philosophies on relief efforts; the effectiveness and accountability of successive British governments; and the impact of emigration on Irish society and new diasporic communities, amongst others. Yet these debates were also contextualized during the 1990s within the wider historiographical dispute over Irish historical revisionism that has divided the Irish academic community since the 1980s,[21] where the Famine proved a key discursive fulcrum, hinged on the interplay between public and academic history.

Though unquestionably an oversimplification, 'revisionism' came to be defined as a methodological approach with aspirations towards objectivity and dispassionate analysis primarily associated with the questioning of the received truths and myths of Irish history. Countering this approach, academics associated with the 'anti-revisionist' camp emphasized the

19 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 52.

20 Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Satisfying a Great Hunger for Guilt and Self-Pity.' *Sunday Tribune*, 15 May 1994.

21 Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994).

subjectivity of historical experience and analysis, and rejected the 'clinical' tone and presupposed bias of revisionists against nationalist accounts of history. The two Irish historical Famine texts typically held to account for each perspective are R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams' *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-52* (1956) and Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-9* (1962). The former, commissioned by Eamon de Valera from University College Dublin historians Edwards and Williams to commemorate the Famine centenary, was intended to deliver the first modern historical account of the Famine period.[22] Finally published in 1956 (and appearing in 1957, ten years after its projected publication date, and too late for the anniversary) the volume comprised a collection of loosely connected edited essays across a range of political, economic and social topics as opposed to a fully synthesized account of the turbulent 1840s. As part of the vanguard of Irish historians then preoccupied with the professionalization of Irish academic practice and the reversal of trenchant nationalist interpretations, Edwards and Williams' dry, detached tone makes little attempt at emotional evocation, and a conscious avoidance of nationalist bias is evident in the foreword: 'There was no conspiracy to destroy the Irish nation.'[23] Unsurprisingly, the vagueness of detail on key issues of mortality ('what is known for certain is only that many, many died'[24]), culpability, and the characterization of figures like Charles Trevelyan more as passive pawns of ideology than active destructive agents, sat poorly with theretofore received understandings of Famine history, particularly those more influenced by John Mitchel's inflammatory nationalist account.[25] The equivocal conclusions of Edwards and Williams' text ultimately subverted the commemorative purpose intended for the volume, neither according with de Valera's own perceptions of the Famine's devastation,[26] nor forthcoming with a definitive verdict: 'If man, the prisoner of time, acts in conformity with the conventions of society into which he is born, it is difficult to judge him with irrevocable harshness.'[27] While it may have succeeded in throwing cold water on the fervour of Mitchelite Famine interpretation, its inability to provide a cohesive narrative replacement met with poor public response

22 Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Making History in Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s: The Saga of *The Great Famine*.' *Irish Review*, no. 12 Spring/Summer (1992): 87–107.

23 Edwards and Williams, eds., *The Great Famine*, xi. Ó Gráda notes that the actual text of the Introduction was in fact 'ghosted' by Kevin Nowlan, then a junior lecturer at UCD. Ó Gráda, 'Making History,' 94.

24 Edwards and Williams, eds., *The Great Famine*, vii.

25 John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland, (Perhaps)* (Glasgow: Cameron, Ferguson, 1860); see also Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, 18–22.

26 Indeed de Valera himself later favoured Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* over the volume he had himself commissioned. See Ó Gráda, 'Making History,' 96–7.

27 Edwards and Williams, eds., *The Great Famine*, xiv.

and readership, reflected in the book's seclusion within the academy. In its quest for objectivity and balance, *The Great Famine* alienated readers seeking affirmation of the tragic, not simply the pragmatic, legacy of Famine.

Subsequent recent criticisms of *The Great Famine* as a commemorative flop (and more serious charges that its 'intellectual honesty had been compromised'[28]) have been grounded as much in this perceived moral failure to engage with the tragic dimensions of Famine memory and experience as in quibbles over methodology and content. *The Great Famine* did not account for, accommodate or accord with popular interpretations or private memories of the Famine (with the notable exception of Robert McHugh's essay 'The Famine in Folklore'), and produced no cohesive declaration of collective agreement over its significance and meaning. Contextualized within the barely visible official response of the centennial commemorations, it seemed (from a contemporary viewpoint) a wholly inadequate response to such a significant anniversary – in short, it did not fulfil the commemorative contract in terms understood by those pursuing similar objectives during the 1990s. However, the degree to which *The Great Famine* can be construed as another form of 'repressing' Famine memory seems ultimately predicated on whether one extends Edwards and Williams' own reticence to judge 'with irrevocable harshness' the actions of historical agents, constrained by their intellectual worldview, back towards the editors themselves.

In any event, the book's failure to capture the academic and public imagination was further magnified by the subsequent publication of what would become the best-selling Irish history book of all time – and the one most referenced, in interview and inscription, by 1990s commemorationists – Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* (1962). Woodham-Smith's account situates the Famine within an engaging narrative structure: historical personalities enter and exit the scene, and she draws upon a wide assortment of archival material to evoke the horrors and individual (not merely collective or statistical) tragedies of the Famine period. *The Great Hunger* also incorporated good quality, relevant illustration, mainly engraved portraits of individuals (Peel, O'Connell, Trevelyan, etc.) and graphic work from *Punch* and *The Illustrated London News*. In contrast, Edwards and Williams' *The Great Famine* was also illustrated, but the images included were often poor quality and clearly afterthoughts, casually and arbitrarily inserted amongst the various essays. Although much of *The Great Hunger* reads like a traditional history, Woodham-Smith occasionally employs the narrative strategies of a suspense thriller, particularly in the use of a one- or two-sentence cliff-hanger to end each chapter. Despite criticisms of

28 Christine Kinealy, 'Economy and Society in Ireland.' In *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 489–503.

Woodham-Smith as a 'populist' historian, some of which are no doubt rooted in such style choices, these narrative techniques do not necessarily detract from the cogency of her arguments; indeed her ultimate conclusion vilifying the policies of Charles Trevelyan is one that has received considerable support from subsequent histories written in a more traditional style.

The Great Hunger's reception in historical circles was notoriously frosty, even forming the basis for a derogatory essay question for undergraduate history students at UCD: '*The Great Hunger* is a great novel. Discuss.'[29] Criticized initially for its emotive rendering of the Famine period, it has since been widely redeemed as a watershed publication, and praised for an interpretative approach that made history accessible for a larger public audience.[30] This turnaround of opinion likely reflects a new consensus as to the range of styles acceptable within the scope of professional history, and may also (as James Donnelly has noted) indicate a contemporary outlook on the Famine more sympathetic to nationalist narratives than was the case mid-century.[31] Yet, as a consequence of the polarization of historians in the wake of the 1980s revisionist debate, *The Great Hunger* has come to symbolize a form of 'unrevised', emotive history frequently used as a counter-example to Williams and Edwards' 'insensitive' volume. This contrast serves to exaggerate such qualities of both works, often simplifying their content to the extent that they become historiographical signifiers (perhaps even anachronistic ones) rather than rich and nuanced historical accounts in their own right.

Some twenty-five years later, Brendan Bradshaw's influential essay 'Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland' (1989) propelled these long-simmering debates among professional historians centre stage, and further refocused attention on Famine historiography as a paradigm for what he characterized as the destructive ethical and methodological practices of revisionist historians, who, in his view, demonstrated a damaging lack of 'empathy and imagination' and of the 'moral and emotional register necessary to respond to human tragedy'.[32] He denounced the debunking of nationalist mythology as an overzealous attempt to correct poetic versions of the past, one that distorted a 'holistic conception of Irish history' linking present people to past generations' experience, and widening the 'credibility gap between the

29 Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), 11. See also Ó Gráda, 'Making History,' and James S. Donnelly Jr., 'The Great Famine: Its Interpreters, Old and New.' *History Ireland* Autumn (1993): 27–33.

30 For various reappraisals of Woodham-Smith's work see Christine Kinealy, Elizabeth Malcolm and William Mulligan, 'Radharc ar gCúl: A Backward Glance.' *New Hibernia Review* 12, no. 4 Geimhreadh/Winter (2008): 134–52.

31 Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, 'Introduction'.

32 Brendan Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland.' *Irish Historical Studies* xxvi, no. 106 (1989): 329–51.

professional historian's account of the past and the public perception of it'.[33] Bradshaw's rejection of the revisionist 'negative bias' in historical interpretation in favour of empathy, imagination, morality and emotion – in essence, the meeting of history and memory – anticipated debates throughout the 1990s commemoration which centred not only on the conclusions reached by Famine historians, but what social role their research should play. Bradshaw's repeated invocation of psychoanalytic terminology further foreshadowed the imbrication of Famine memory within the rhetoric of historical trauma that pervaded sesquicentenary narratives. Accusing revisionists of 'filtering out the trauma' of Irish history, marked by 'successive waves of conquest and colonisation, by bloody wars and uprisings, by traumatic social dislocation, by lethal racial antagonisms, and indeed, by its own nineteenth-century version of a holocaust',[34] Bradshaw delivered such descriptions of 'trauma' and 'holocaust' as unquestionable analogies: only in the false interpretative techniques of the revisionists was the 'truth' of Irish 'historical trauma' denied. The associative power of the Holocaust, genocide and trauma would come to play a central role in the discursive and visual framing of the 1990s commemorative period; it is worth noting here an early modern academic emergence of such terminology in Bradshaw's text.

Reversion to the ideological shorthand of 'revisionism' and its discontents yet persists as a common framing device within many Famine book reviews and new texts – and as will be seen, the influence of this debate deeply impacted upon commemorative monuments produced during the 1990s, and the public narratives that supported them. The diversity of recent interdisciplinary Famine studies offers some initial indications that the reductive revisionist/anti-revisionist stranglehold on Famine history may be weakening, but such a conclusion is far from certain. Certainly many recent public monuments (especially in the diaspora) indicate that old pieties have scarcely lost their potency, within the academy as well as without: the extent to which scholarship on Ireland has moved decisively towards 'forty shades of grey, rather than black and white or orange and green'[35] remains debatable.

The 1990s sesquicentenary

In February 1995 President Mary Robinson addressed the Houses of the Oireachtas, setting out her vision of the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Irish Famine that was to commence that year:

33 Ibid., 341, 45–6.
34 Ibid., 338.
35 Daly, 'Forty Shades of Grey?,' 108.

> I have become more convinced each year that this great narrative of dispossession and belonging, which so often had its origins in sorrow and leave-taking, has become – with a certain amount of historic irony – one of the treasures of our society [...] The weight of the past, the researches of our local interpreters and the start of the remembrance of the famine all, in my view, point us towards a single reality: that commemoration is a moral act, just as our relation in this country to those who have left it is a moral relationship. We have too much at stake in both not to be rigorous.[36]

Her statement effectively outlines the major features of Famine commemoration that were to emerge in the years after her address: the 'moral' imperative to address contemporary famine derived from a sense of historical responsibility and sympathetic suffering; a focus on the Irish immigrant diaspora as the major repository of Famine memory and sorrow; and the recasting of tragic histories as narratives of trauma, renewal and/or triumph. Such themes would permeate the process and products of the 1990s commemorative period, albeit to varying degrees in the differing national contexts where commemorations took place. Within Ireland the official programme of commemoration (and accompanying local, national and international activities) evolved within a political climate where the contemporary significance of Famine memory was yet indeterminate. Ongoing violence in Northern Ireland (with the peace process still far from resolution at the time of Robinson's address), growing economic prosperity which precipitated declarations of a 'new relationship' with Britain and expanded Irish influence within the European Union, and the emergence of a new globalized national identity that would renew and refresh links with the diaspora, all formed the backdrop against which the revival of Famine memory would be staged. In the absence of centralized direction, commemorative activities in the diaspora (as subsequent chapters will explore) evidenced the combined influence of the Irish State's official imperatives; national and local historical framings of Famine memory; and contemporary local, state and federal politics particular to each country (the dominating presence of the AOH and increased public initiatives to assert ethnic difference in the United States, for example, or the federal politics of multiculturalism – and its discontents – in Canada).

Yet from where – and how – did the 'official' programme emerge, what were its outcomes, and what influence did it exert upon commemorative efforts within the Republic and beyond? Awareness of the Famine's impending 150th anniversary had been growing since the mid-1980s, and

36 Mary Robinson, *'Cherishing the Irish Diaspora': Address to the Houses of Oireachtas on a Matter of Public Importance*, Dublin: 2 February 1995.

numerous local historical groups had initiated Famine projects several years in advance of the Irish government's commencement of formal preparations. A major force in the commemorations in Ireland and abroad was Action from Ireland (AfrI), an NGO active in 'Third World' aid and development issues who launched their 'Great Famine Project' in 1984 in connection with a visit to Ireland by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.[37] In a 1995 publication prefacing the government's announcement of its programme, AfrI listed its own objectives for the commemorative period:

> (1) To ensure that the 150th anniversary of Ireland's 'Great Famine' is commemorated in a dignified and challenging way, both nationally and internationally.
>
> (2) To publicly honour Ireland's several hundred unmarked mass 'Famine' graves with dignity and reverence.
>
> (3) To harness the memory of Ireland's 'Great Famine experience as a window through which the Irish (at home and abroad) can better understand the cause and effect of poverty and hunger on the world's poor today – and to encourage an appropriate response.[38]

AfrI's influential activities between 1984 and 1994 included a U.S. lecture tour sponsored by the Irish American Cultural Institute in 1991, local talks and lectures delivered across Ireland and Canada, the commissioning of a 'Famine Symphony' from Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains in 1989 (also performed in 1995 in Québec City), and their well-publicized 'Famine walks'[39] conducted from 1988 to raise funds and awareness of contemporary famine and relief issues (Figure 3.2). In 1993 representatives from AfrI met with Fianna Fáil Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach Tom Kitt and offered recommendations for an official commemorative programme based on a five-point agenda; the similarity of the eventual plan adopted by the government to AfrI's proposals leaves no doubt as to its central influence on the eventual shape of the commemorations.[40] Indeed, it was during AfrI's seventh annual Famine walk in Louisburgh, Co. Mayo that Minister Kitt

37 Don Mullan, ed., *A Glimmer of Light: An Overview of Great Hunger Commemorative Events in Ireland and Throughout the World* (Dublin: Concern Worldwide, 1995), 32–5; Interview with Don Mullan (Former chairman, Action from Ireland), 1 August 2007. Mullan was one of the chief organizers of AfrI and Concern's Famine commemorations.

38 Mullan, ed., *A Glimmer of Light*, 32.

39 See Chapter 4.

40 Interview with Mullan (2007).

Figure 3.2 AfrI Famine Walk, 1995, with Gabriel Byrne, John Pilger, Juana Vasquez, Gary White Deer & Dano Caal. Photo: Derek Speirs, courtesy of AfrI

officially announced the establishment of the government's National Famine Commemoration Committee in May 1994, to be led under his direction.

After a change in government, Kitt was replaced in February 1995 by TD Avril Doyle (Fine Gael, succeeding Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach), who would lead the committee through its most significant planning and execution phases. A two-year budget of £250,000 per annum was established, and the official commemorative period set as 1995–1997.[41]

41 The designation of 1997 as the end date for the Famine's commemoration drew criticism from historians like Cormac Ó Gráda, who pointed out that the Famine's

The committee comprised civil servants from a cross-section of government departments, including Environment; Tourism and Trade; Education; Agriculture, Food and Forestry; Foreign Affairs; Finance; Social Welfare; the Office of Public Works; and the National Museum (representing Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht). The same committee went on to direct the government's 1798 bicentenary celebrations, which swiftly picked up where the Famine commemorations ended.[42]

Aside from the chronological structure and practical support the official programme lent to commemorative activities, the distribution of government monies was designed to reflect all levels of national and community commemoration, from local cemetery clean-ups to massive outdoor public events, thinly spread over a wide geographic area. Prioritized expenditures included the development of a National Famine Memorial and National Famine Museum/Centre; an RTÉ television documentary on the Famine; a National Famine History Research Project supporting an ambitious programme of research; a series of concerts, exhibitions, plays and lectures; the renovation of local Famine graveyards and archaeological excavations; and a wide array of other activities in Ireland, the U.K., the U.S., Australia and Canada.[43] In interview Doyle reflected on the criteria used to make funding decisions with respect to commemorative projects:

> Mainly it was left to good taste, and the relevance to the local Famine story. Certainly I liked to bring life back to a lot of the buildings that remained from that era [… we favoured] those that felt right, and which had a committee that would see them through […] we had to take care we had a geographical spread of the money, too.[44]

A booklet entitled *Ireland's Famine: Commemoration and Awareness* by the National Famine Commemoration Committee published details of

effects carried on well into 1850: Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Making Irish Famine History in 1995.' *History Workshop Journal* 42, Fall (1996): 195–214; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'There was no Famine in 1845.' *Irish Independent*, 7 March 1995. Doyle's justification for the time frame referred to the possible onset of 'Famine fatigue', and the practical feasibility of keeping the commemoration at the top of the government's agenda: Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Famine Commemoration* (8 February 1995), Vol. 448.

42 From 1995–8 historian Kevin Whelan also served as government advisor on both the Famine and 1798 commemorations.

43 Details of funding allocations derived from Department of the Taoiseach, *Famine Commemoration Committee Expenditures, 1995–7 (Report Provided to Chairperson Avril Doyle by Alice Kearney in the Commemoration Office, Department of the Taoiseach, in Response to a Dáil Question Addressed to the Taoiseach on 26 March 1997)* (Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach, 1 July 1998).

44 Interview with Doyle (2007).

commemorative events planned across Ireland, and reiterated the main themes around which the government's commemoration would revolve: historical retrospection and introspection, emigration and the establishment of the diaspora, and 'Third World' development issues.[45]

These themes were further explicated in a series of prepared statements delivered in October 1995, during the Dáil sessions officially marking the 150th anniversary.[46] The statements from seventeen TDs constitute compelling examples of cross-political interpretations of Famine history, as well as prevailing political preoccupations enveloped within commemorative rhetoric. Despite the emphatic declaration of Famine 'facts' that precedes nearly every speech, these mini-histories differed markedly in emphasis and source material consulted. The resulting kaleidoscope of historical retrospections revealed how deeply divided political thinking on the Famine continued to be, even if the concept of shaping an official state commemoration seemed to necessitate some kind of consensus, and however much the contingency of historical understanding was rhetorically denied by participants.

Despite the varied emphases of the speakers, all made particular reference to Ireland's role in support of international aid programmes, with the Famine Commemoration Committee's initiatives in Eritrea and Ethiopia singled out for praise. Minister Doyle similarly placed heavy emphasis on the contemporary experience of Famine in her opening statement, asking, 'Is there not a parallel between our experience of the 1840s and the state of the world today?'[47] The moral responsibility for the relief of contemporary hunger and distress emerged as perhaps the most dominant official theme throughout the Republic's commemorative period, reflected also in funding allocations: the four direct aid projects mentioned by Doyle as part of the committee's budget ultimately represented over 20% of the funds disbursed.[48] The

45 National Famine Commemoration Committee, *Ireland's Famine: Commemoration and Awareness* (Dublin: Famine Commemoration Committee, 1995); National Famine Commemoration Committee, *Directory of Commemorative Events* (Department of the Taoiseach, 1995).

46 Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine: Statements* (5 October 1995), Vol. 456. Unless otherwise noted, quotes from TDs are drawn from these published *Statements*.

47 Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine*.

48 This figure is derived from a total of £497,192.05 disbursed under the committee's remit. The four projects include £11,500 given to an Eritrean potato seed famine relief project (Self Help International); £15,030 for the Lesotho Famine Water Relief project; £30,000 for a Teagasc blight resistance research project in Mexico, and £50,030 to the Ethiopian Famine Food Reserve Project. This budget does not include large government expenditures on a number of Famine-related initiatives, particularly the *National Famine Memorial* in Mayo and the *Jeanie Johnston*.

three major Irish NGOs concerned with overseas aid and development (Concern, Trocáire and AfrI) had lobbied for the alignment of the commemorations with development issues since the mid-1980s in conjunction with their prominent roles in promoting and organizing Famine commemorative activities. Concern's guide to upcoming sesquicentennial anniversary activities in 1995 referenced their own commitment 'to contributing to this unique historical moment and, in the best tradition of all that is good in Irish people, to create, on their behalf, a life-giving memorial to our Famine dead'.[49] Other events, such as the 'Live Aid' style concert held in Millstreet, Co. Cork and classical concerts in Dublin and various Australian cities received funding from the government with the intent that their proceeds would assist development projects.

Adding momentum to the 'Third World' agenda was President Mary Robinson, who zealously embraced the commemorations and donned the mantle of diasporic ambassador, making appearances at commemorative ceremonies and memorial unveilings around the world. Robinson's championing of human rights and development issues dominated her presidency; notably, she was the first head of state to visit Rwanda after its genocide in 1994, and eventually left the presidency to assume the role of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 1997. Robinson made frequent reference in commemorative speeches to her visits to refugee camps in Somalia, Tanzania and Zaire, stressing the Irish responsibility for humanitarian action and a keener perspective 'which springs directly from our self-knowledge as a people'.[50] As the most eloquent advocate for the fusion of Famine memory with contemporary famine activism, in her public addresses she repeatedly emphasized the congruities between Irish and African experiences of hunger and colonization, and delivered her vision of Ireland as a potential international leader on these issues. Ireland's obligations in the wake of the Famine, according to this paradigm, were based on a new model of self-awareness engendered by active historic retrospection and moral introspection. The moral responsibility of sympathetic suffering, as manifested in such officially sponsored activities and rhetoric, is similarly enshrined in the main dedication on the *National Famine Memorial* in Mayo unveiled during Robinson's presidency: 'To honour the memory of all who died, suffered and emigrated due to the Great Famine of 1845-1850 and to victims of all famines.'

49 Aengus Finucane (CEO of Concern Worldwide), preface to Mullan, ed., *A Glimmer of Light*.

50 Robinson, *'Cherishing the Irish Diaspora'*. Robinson reiterated these themes in her opening of the Strokestown Famine Museum in 1994: 'Famine gives Ireland "Moral Authority" in World Affairs.' *Sunday Tribune*, 15 May 1995.

The deployment of Famine memory to address wider social and global issues nevertheless remained a complicated association fraught with conflicting impulses. The 'moral authority' of Ireland on humanitarian issues conferred a special status on the nation within a new European Union; in describing Ireland as 'a First World country with a Third World memory of famine, dislocation, and exile',[51] Minister Doyle reflected this conception of Ireland as comfortably situated within a modern, progressive European idiom whilst distinguished by a tragic history rendering it especially sensitive to the plight of those facing famine and exile in the developing world. Yet as Irial Glynn has pointed out, the record of the Irish state on the treatment of foreign asylum-seekers up to and after 1995 hardly supports such a self-conception on the domestic front. As Glynn notes, during the Dáil debates held on the Refugee Bill of 1995 (the first major debate on asylum in recent Irish history) – held just two weeks after the '150th Anniversary of the Famine: Statements' session on 5 October 1995 – speakers offered unusually effusive expressions of solidarity and compassion on asylum issues,[52] referring again to the memory of the Irish Famine in mobilizing such sentiments and the transferral of overseas aid enthusiasm towards efforts at home.[53] However, the 'unprecedented official Irish sympathy for asylum seekers' sparked by the commemorations proved short-lived; by 1997 public opinion and political sentiment had largely reverted to characterizations of asylum-seekers as politically, socially and economically dangerous to the future of the modern Irish state.[54]

In any case, the prompting of 'Famine empathy' to motivate charitable giving or philanthropic sentiment did not necessarily demand a radicalized political transformation, which in part explains the success and ubiquity of this commemorative narrative across groups of all political persuasions. Emphasis on a soft-focus, outwardly-radiating historical empathy could avoid divisive contemporary politics concerning immigration or social inequality more difficult to resolve or market to the public – a mode of emotive petition with undeniable echoes of the *Illustrated London News* Famine appeals of the

51 National Famine Commemoration Committee, *Ireland's Famine*, 3.

52 Irial Glynn, 'Famine Commemorations and Asylum Debates in Ireland Conflated.' In *History, Memory and Migration: Perceptions of the Past and the Politics of Incorporation*, ed. Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173–88.

53 Joe Costello (Labour), Dáil Éireann Debates, *Refugee Bill, 1995* (19 October 1995). Other speakers combining support for the Bill with calls to Famine memory included John O'Donoghue (Fianna Fáil), Liz O'Donnell (Progressive Democrats), Michael P. Kitt (Fianna Fáil) and Tony Killeen (Fianna Fáil).

54 Glynn, 'Famine Commemorations,' 183–5.

nineteenth century – and refocus attention on the positive reinforcement of a new, globalized Irish identity.[55]

However positive the financial outcome in aid of worthy endeavours, the translation of the Famine's legacy into a narrative of triumph and renewal for political and fundraising purposes further carried with it a negative capacity for the falsification or distortion of Famine history. Ó Gráda warned against the complacent usage of Famine history as support for such contemporary crusades, in one instance reprimanding the organizers of a re-enactment 'Famine walk' from Doolough to Louisburgh for relying on an anecdotal account of mortality that had no basis in historical fact;[56] further he has suggested that Irish memory links with 'Third World' famine probably have more to do with Ireland's history of missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa than any true sense of historical empathy.[57] In his overview of the commemorative period, Peter Gray similarly disputed the truth claims and comparisons made by NGO leaders, via their production of popular Famine histories and campaign materials. In Gray's view:

> Such globalizing rhetoric leaves little room for examination of the historical specificities of the Irish case – perhaps legitimate in the polemical enthusiasm of humanitarian campaigning, but problematic with respect to a memorialisation process in which making justifiable truth-claims about the past is seen as essential.[58]

The extremes enabled by such ideological appropriations were demonstrated during the 1997 Seanad sessions marking the 150th anniversary, where appeals to Famine memory were used as support for such wildly varying political causes as North Korean humanitarian aid, a claim of a U.S.-created famine in Cuba, and the abolishment of abortion.[59]

If overseas development offered one platform for the deployment of Famine memory, a more immediately controversial trajectory targeted the issue of assigning blame for the Famine. As early as February 1995 the Minister of State made reference in the Dáil to 'the maturity of this Government in

55 The absence of historical parallels drawn between historical and contemporary immigration is also noticeable at the site of diasporic memorials, which more typically reference African famine and global hunger than domestic controversies concerning new immigrant communities.

56 Ó Gráda, 'Satisfying a Great Hunger.' See also Ó Gráda, 'There was no Famine in 1845.'

57 Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Great Famine and Other Famines.' In *Famine 150*, ed. Cormac Ó Gráda (Dublin: Teagasc: University College Dublin, 1997), 129–57.

58 Gray, 'Memory and Commemoration,' 54.

59 Seanad Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine: Statements* (27 November 1997), Vol. 152.

dealing with the Anglo-Irish axis of the famine', a comment underlined with concerns voiced in Ireland and Britain that the commemorations would add fuel to sectarian conflict.[60] On the other side of the issue, opposition leader Bertie Ahern (Fianna Fáil) waged a political challenge to centralize British responsibility in the commemorative programme, arguing 'There is a need to educate the British public about what happened here 150 years ago [...] I resent and reject the views of people who believe that we should be apologists for what happened [...] and "go soft on the issue."'[61] Again the extensive 1995 Dáil 'Statements' on the Famine in October provide accounts of the range of positions on either side, divided predictably along party lines. Fine Gael speakers downplayed the issue of responsibility, reiterating themes of 'Third World' aid and the 'lessons' of the Famine addressed by Doyle in her opening remarks. A few, including Seymour Crawford, explicitly rejected Ahern's suggestion: 'we must endeavour to forget some of the past, learn from it and bury the hatchet [...] It is my hope that the raking over of events 150 years ago, any more than of those of 300 years ago, will not stir up any animosity or other trouble.' Revisiting Ahern's earlier comments from June during these October debates, Avril Doyle herself retorted:

> It has been suggested that the Government may be going softly on commemorating the Famine because of the peace process. On the contrary, the peace process allows us all the more freely to explore the truth. The relations between the two islands have reached a maturity that allows us to look at our history objectively. It is in the spirit of understanding and reconciliation that we are now commemorating the Great Famine.[62]

Without question the delicate status of the 1994 IRA cease-fire and the tortured evolution of the Northern Irish peace process loomed over commemorative action as well as rhetoric, with some sponsored projects (like the *Jeanie Johnston*) consciously incorporating cross-border elements,[63] and the selection of a Northern Irish location for the launch of official government commemorations a bid towards inclusion of the North in the programme of events.[64] Ahern's persistence in seeking an official British recognition of

60 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Famine Commemoration.*

61 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Great Famine Commemoration* (21 June 1995), Vol. 454.

62 Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine.*

63 The workforce building the replica Famine-era ship included young people from nationalist and unionist backgrounds, from Northern Ireland and the Republic.

64 A ceremony in a Famine graveyard at Enniskillen, Fermanagh on 28 August 1995 marked the initial outbreak of blight reported in that area (later followed by a

fault for the Famine was not assuaged by such talk of 'new realities' and relationships with the United Kingdom; after the Dáil 'Official Statements' he again enquired whether the Taoiseach would seek an apology from the British for the Famine – a suggestion Doyle once again rejected.[65] Yet Ahern and his supporters' efforts were unexpectedly to meet a satisfactory resolution as Tony Blair's 'message of reconciliation', solicited for and read aloud by actor Gabriel Byrne at the Great Irish Famine Event in June 1997, was widely perceived as a form of 'apology' for the Famine.[66]

The phrasing of Blair's 'apology', however, reflects on the issue of responsibility in the vaguest of terms, admitting only that 'those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy.' The final tone of his statement is not one of regret but of celebration; the tragedy becomes a precondition of triumph, where ultimately the commemoration serves to 'celebrate the resilience and courage of those men and women who were able to forge another life outside Ireland'. That Blair's statement was so widely interpreted as an apology indicated a pervading sense of grievance determined to find resolution or outlet, no matter how inadequate the force of the catalyzing statement. By acknowledging some responsibility (however mild) as well as the ongoing 'pain' of the Famine, Blair's remarks were paradoxically used in the press to confirm both those commemorative agendas seeking to nurture grievance, and those seeking a form of therapeutic healing.[67]

One might question, however, what real inroads such gestures of 'understanding and reconciliation' or even 'apology' could make to defiantly held memories, when two years later, during the Seanad session of official 150th anniversary statements, Senator Don Lydon (Fianna Fáil) could repeat John Mitchel's declaration of 'a million and a half men, women and children […] carefully, prudently and peacefully slain by the English Government', insisting that 'such sentiment expressed by so great an Irishman who

monument designed by Eamonn O'Doherty; see Chapter 4). Another ceremony at St Mary's Cathedral in Killarney in 1995 involved a 'Tree of Light' intended to commemorate both victims of the Famine and the Troubles: 'North Victims Recalled.' *Irish Independent*, 18 December 1995.

65 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: British Apology for Great Famine* (25 October 1995), Vol. 457.

66 The statement was read out by Byrne at the 'Great Famine Commemoration Event' in Millstreet, Co. Cork to an audience of thousands, and subsequently reported in the Irish and international press.

67 The tenor and consequence of Blair's statement continues to raise hackles on both sides: in a 2012 interview, Jeremy Paxman of the BBC's *Newsnight* accused Blair of 'moral vacuousness' in offering up his 1997 'Famine apology'; Paxman's statement drew immediate calls for retraction and apology in the Irish media (Tristram Hunt, 'Jeremy Paxman on the British Empire and the BBC.' *Radio Times*, 25 February–2 March 2012).

witnessed these horrors must always linger and refute any revisionist attempts to obscure reality.'[68] Accusations that the practice of academic history was producing false accounts of the past not in line with the commemorative programme reopened the fissure perceived between revisionist and public history, albeit on a reductive scale mired in political discourse. The term 'revisionist' quickly reverted to a derogatory buzzword for anti-nationalist sentiment of any stripe and degree, damning enough for even Doyle to distance the government from such endorsements.[69] The views of politicians like David Andrews indicated the extent to which historiographical debates had permeated into public consciousness: 'Historians have recently taken up this very emotive subject and attempted to sanitise Irish history and to engage in a form of hysterical [sic] revisionism which is not acceptable to me or my party.'[70]

The hostile reactions accorded to Michael McDowell (Progressive Democrats) during the Dáil sessions are in this context unsurprising, as he emerged a lone dissenter sympathetic to revisionist concerns, expressing a more sceptical notion of Irish memory and its usage:

> We are not entirely a Gaelic peasant society; we never were […] in terms of history we are not very generous to those who are not nationalist and separatist […] In terms of finding fault or blame let us remember that, probably, most of our ancestors lived through that episode more or less unscathed and not as troubled by it as an event as we would perhaps like to think […] We should not entertain ourselves to a diet of simplistic moralizing on this subject – we can do more than that, we can understand the complexity of that society.[71]

McDowell's ambivalent sense of Famine history, unique among the 'official' political statements, was not a popular one among his fellow speakers, though it perhaps most closely aligned with recent shifts in Famine historical thinking within the academy.[72] The attempts of commemorationists to

68 Seanad Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine*.

69 In February 1995 Doyle responded to a challenge from TD Mary O'Rourke on the 'sensitivities' at stake with respect to Famine history, answering, 'the Deputy need not fear any revisionism in the way we do it.' Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Famine Commemoration*. Doyle again rejected the revisionist label during the Dáil commemorative statements: 'over one million died from starvation […] A further one million emigrated under appalling conditions […] This is fact, not fiction, and it is not open to historical revisionism.' Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine*.

70 David Andrews, Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine*.

71 Michael McDowell, Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine*.

72 See especially the contributions published in February of that year by Peter Gray,

anchor competing versions of history and pin the tricolour on a constantly shifting sense of the past resonate with Jay Winter's description of commemorative ritual as an 'act of citizenship', which serves to 'affirm community, to assert its moral character, and to exclude from it those values, groups, or individuals that placed it under threat'.[73] Just as Irish national 'moral character' could be confirmed via an advocacy role in development issues, so too might the attempted exclusion of a mediated or 'revised' history impose a collective commemorative cohesion where none clearly existed.

The final – and perhaps most multi-faceted – collective narrative tasked with explaining a catastrophic past whilst commanding and affirming the agency of the present centred on recasting the Famine and its memory as 'cultural trauma':

> In Ireland, for example, the dislocations produced by rapid economic growth may help explain the recent surge of interest in the traumatic experience of the 1840s famine […] there remains a demand for some historical continuity, a collective identity rooted in a distinctive 'Irish' past; and the Famine appeared to many to offer a focus that was at once catastrophic, local, diasporic and relevant to the modern world.[74]

Such re-framings of the Famine as trauma paralleled efforts worldwide during the 1990s to reconsider past catastrophes through the lens of historical trauma, reparation and recovery, where

> collective memory is articulated as a traumatic relationship with the past in which the group identifies itself as a victim through its recognition of a shared experience of violence. Notwithstanding the different contexts, the moral framework that emerges is the same: suffering establishes grounds for a cause; the event demands a reinterpretation of history.[75]

Domestic and diasporic reinterpretations prompted by the orthodoxy of trauma encompassed academic, popular and official directives and perspectives – from epistemologies to historical apologies – united by a conviction that contemporary society was now uniquely positioned to address

Cormac Ó Gráda et al. in Cathal Póirtéir, ed., *The Great Irish Famine (Thomas Davis Lecture Series)* (Cork: Mercier Press in association with RTÉ, 1995).

73 Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 80.

74 Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver, 'The Memory of Catastrophe.' *History Today* 51, no. 2, February (2001): 9–15.

75 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 15–16.

the magnitude of the Famine experience and its myriad repercussions. The failure of the 1940s generation to foreground the Famine anniversary was increasingly characterized by contemporary commemorationists as 'silence', 'repression' or 'amnesia' in the wake of a profoundly traumatic cultural memory; publication of personal Famine memory narratives ensconced in the language of post-traumatic stress disorder abounded in periodical and book form; and debates concerning historical culpability, genocidal intent and the latent traumatic effects of the Famine were renewed in spoken and published discourse. Within the academy, trauma as hermeneutic gained traction both within Famine historical practice and Irish studies (particularly postcolonial and literary criticism) – alternately re-evaluating the imprint of the Famine on its survivors and descendants, or theorizing a national cultural condition characterized by traumatic disruption, loss and unresolved repressions. Perhaps no other dimension of the Famine's commemoration offers more compelling evidence of the politicized present's sway over the collective past, substantiating Maurice Halbwachs' view that 'the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society';[76] the remainder of this chapter will address the relationship of traumatic rhetoric to Famine memory and its consequences for monumental commemoration.

Trauma, memory and monumentality

Trauma, silence, shame, guilt, therapy and healing: how and why has the Famine – and its memory – come to be understood in such terms? As Conor Carville has observed:

> concepts of trauma and the wound have emerged in recent years as a means of providing identity and community [...] in Ireland this emergence must be understood in relation to both a colonial discourse of temporal disruption and contemporary political exigencies [...][77]

Carville's critique of 'traumaculture' in Irish society concerns the recurrent characterization of Irish history and society as somehow out-of-time and consequently trapped in the past (i.e. suffering from 'temporal disruption'), reinforcing a narrow nationalism and other forms of cultural exceptionalism. For him the framing of Famine memory represents a powerful (if

76 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 51.

77 Conor Carville, '"Keeping that Wound Green": Irish Studies and Traumaculture.' In *What Rough Beasts? Irish and Scottish Studies in the New Millennium*, ed. Shane Alcobia-Murphy (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008), 45–71.

problematic) example where Irish 'wound culture', as popularly and theoretically constituted, 'becomes the ground on which an identity is constructed: the excluded past event – as absence – is posited and becomes a fixed point'.[78] Carville's essay attests to the widespread adoption of 'trauma theory' across the Irish humanities, a line of critical inquiry that forms part of a much larger and widespread movement to transfer the symptomology, diagnosis and therapeutic treatment of clinical (individual) trauma to the historical and cultural (collective) realm.[79] For some Irish scholars this transposition has been direct and relatively untroubled: historian Christine Kinealy, for example, has argued that the 'malignant shame' and 'transgenerational trauma' of the Famine can be identified and mapped onto contemporary Irish and diasporic society – an endeavour twinned, in her view, with the imperative to counter the sterility of historical revisionism.[80] Others – including the literary critics David Lloyd and Stuart McLean – have more cautiously integrated psychoanalytic and postcolonial perspectives, parsing the Famine as part of an inherited legacy of colonial violence which cast long shadows over a tortuous evolution towards Irish 'modernity', but stopping short of (and indeed critiquing) simplistic 'therapeutic' recovery tactics indiscriminately applied.[81] In any event, as the work of Ruth Leys and Dominick LaCapra has demonstrated,[82] trauma remains a deeply contestable and politically constituted epistemology whose translations in the commemorative sphere warrant close scrutiny.

In the case of the Famine, a motley variety of 'symptoms' were identified during the commemorative period as evidence of society's traumatic and atavistic relationship with Famine history, serving to both define and legitimize contemporary relationships with the past. In particular, the notion of a pervasive official and popular 'silence' on the Famine (stretching from

78 Carville, '"Keeping that Wound Green",' 57.

79 The ascendancy of trauma theory as hermeneutic has been most influentially theorized in the literary criticism of Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

80 Kinealy, '"The Famine Killed Everything,"' 14–18.

81 Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 25–9; McLean, *The Event and its Terrors*, 154–7.

82 Ruth Leys' work in particular has yielded significant influence with her genealogical dissection of variations of trauma theory operative within psychology and other disciplines. LaCapra has similarly explored the origins and dominance of traumatic analysis within narration and representation. See Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

the nineteenth century to the present) emerged as a key touchpoint for commentators in the 1990s, usually interpreted as evidence for the Famine's lingering traumatic effects, and constructed as a void aching to be filled with the efforts of contemporary remembrance:[83]

> Separated from the Famine by 150 years, and with documented accounts foregrounding silences and ellipses, our reconstructions operate at a double remove from that traumatic history. Whilst no Famine survivors remain to bear witness, we become the interlocutors of that history; we bear witness to the witnesses. Precisely by listening to silence and sharing the struggle to articulate, we begin to discern a Famine "experience".[84]

References to the role of the contemporary 'witness' in giving voice to the Famine can be found in numerous monuments' inscriptions, as in the Philadelphia *Irish Memorial*'s (2003) declaration that 'the time to take away the silence has come, to commemorate', or the *Western New York Irish Famine Memorial*'s inscription which refers to breaking '"The Great Silence" – that period following the Famine when no one dared speak of it' (Buffalo, 1997). However, at the same moment when such commemorations sought to speak for the 'voiceless', new surveys of Irish folklore and Famine-era literature emerged to refute presumptions of Famine silence, and warn against the dangers of such interpretations of the written and spoken record. As Niall Ó Ciosáin remarked, there was some irony in the emergence of the 'Famine silence' trope at a time when more was being said about the Famine than ever before, enquiring in 1995: 'What are the implications, particularly for historians and for commemoration, of the assumption of absence of memory? […] is the diagnosis accurate? Has the Famine been forgotten, ignored or suppressed?'[85] His essay answers the final two questions substantially in the negative, a point of view further affirmed by the work of Cormac Ó Gráda, Christopher Morash, Carmel Quinlan and Patricia Lysaght.[86] Nevertheless,

83 Mary Robinson referred to the breaking of silence through commemoration as 'a moral act'. John Healy and Joseph Power, 'President Praises Efforts to Break "Famine Silence."' *Irish Independent*, 24 August 1995.

84 Scott Brewster and Virginia Crossman, 'Re-Writing the Famine: Witnessing in Crisis.' In *Ireland in Proximity: History, Genre, Space*, ed. Scott Brewster et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 53.

85 Ó Ciosáin, 'Was there "Silence" about the Famine?' 7.

86 Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol*; Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*; Morash, 'Spectres of the Famine'; Carmel Quinlan, '"A Punishment from God": The Famine in the Centenary Folklore Questionnaire.' *Irish Review* no. 19 Spring/Summer (1996); Patricia Lysaght, 'Perspectives on Women during the Great Irish Famine.' *Bealoideas: Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 64-5 (1996-7): 63–130.

the widely held belief in Irish society's historic 'silence' on the Famine was a central motivating factor in its extensive visual and material memorialization worldwide, referenced extensively in interviews held between the author and members of commemorative committees in Ireland and the diaspora, and indelibly shaping the nature of the sites, forms and symbols adopted for physical commemorations.

Though the traumatic thesis of Famine has continued to attract criticism from historians since the 1990s and beyond (particularly from Ó Ciosáin as well as Roy Foster, Edna Longley, Margaret Kelleher and Cormac Ó Gráda[87]), its effect on political and popular discourse has been profound. The chair of the Irish National Famine Commemoration Committee, Avril Doyle frequently deployed metaphors of trauma, therapy and healing in her public addresses: 'It is only by facing the trauma caused by this immense tragedy honestly and openly in seeking genuine understanding that we can heal some of the hurt caused throughout Irish history. Despite the pain and its complexity, we must not repress our history.'[88] Others like TD Kathleen Lynch (Labour) suggested that the Famine was a trauma biologically imprinted on anyone of Irish descent:

> Each one of us is the survivor of survivors of the Famine […] We have an inherited memory which is part and parcel of our DNA, and, to a great extent, it has formed our opinions and attitudes to other countries stricken by famine […] We have a genetically inherited memory which will not allow us to forget.[89]

The language of trauma, repression and healing recur in both official rhetoric and many personal narratives published in honour of the commemoration: in California senator Tom Hayden's edited collection of essays, *Irish Hunger*,[90] contributors identified the 'symptoms' of Famine trauma evidenced in

87 Foster, *The Irish Story*; Edna Longley, 'Northern Ireland: Commemoration, Elegy, Forgetting.' In *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 223–53; Kelleher, 'Hunger and history'; Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory'.

88 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Great Famine Commemoration.*

89 Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine.*

90 Tom Hayden, ed., *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine* (Boulder/Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers/Wolfhound Press, 1997). Several contributions to this volume received particularly stringent criticism from Longley: 'The incidence of "trauma" and "repression" in *Irish Hunger* confirms the responsibility of Irish-American *weltschmerz* for introducing psycho-babble, as well as Riverdance, into the theatre of Irish memory. Many contributors – including some Irish writers – evince a kind of false memory syndrome by free-associating upon what they yet agree to be "silence."' Longley, 'Northern Ireland,' 232.

their own lives; for one writer, this genetic repression was expressed by an inexplicable tendency to buy too much food at the grocery market.[91] Hayden himself described the 'transgenerational shame' of the Famine which in his view had served to oppress the potential of the contemporary Irish diaspora: 'We are, as it turns out, the children of the dispossessed and the legacy of this mass migration can only be one of loss and of confusion.'[92]

Perhaps inevitably, the Holocaust emerged in Famine commemorative discourse as the comparative example *par excellence*, reprising its increasingly commonplace role as global 'cipher' for articulations of traumatic memory.[93] While accusations of genocidal intent have long held sway within a minority Irish nationalist tradition – and analogies to Nazi Germany had controversially surfaced a generation earlier, in book reviews of *The Great Hunger* in 1962[94] – the Famine commemorative period saw such views voiced stridently in the mainstream. Sean Kenny, author of a contemporary Famine novel where the protagonist time-travels to experience first-hand the horror of Famine, queried whether the Famine constituted Ireland's 'Final Solution';[95] literary scholar Terry Eagleton referred to the 'Irish Auschwitz';[96] and a PhD dissertation submitted in Massachusetts in 2000 assessed the psychological impact of the Famine, diagnosing subsequent generations of Irish people and their descendants as suffering from genocide-induced post-traumatic stress disorder.[97] On the memorial front, fringe activist Chris Fogarty attempted to erect markers around Ireland which note the location of 'mass murders' of the Irish by British regiments; meanwhile the president of the Philadelphia Irish Memorial Committee also explicitly rejected the term 'famine' in connection with their memorial: 'How can the failure of one crop constitute a famine? There was no scarcity of food […] The English stole land from the Irish.'[98]

91 Carolyn Ramsay, 'The Need to Feed.' In *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine*, ed. Tom Hayden (Boulder/Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers/Wolfhound Press, 1997), 137–42.

92 Sean Kenny, 'A Nightmare Revisited.' In *Irish Hunger: Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine*, ed. Tom Hayden (Boulder/Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers/Wolfhound Press, 1997), 181–200.

93 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 14–15. See also Chapter 5, Introduction.

94 Frank O'Connor, 'Murder Unlimited.' *The Irish Times*, 10 November 1962; A.J.P Taylor, 'Genocide.' *The New Statesman* 64 23 November (1962): 741–2.

95 Kenny, 'A Nightmare Revisited,' 189–90.

96 Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

97 Deborah Peck, 'Silent Hunger. The Psychological Impact of the Great Irish Hunger: An Gorta Mor (1845-1852)' (PhD thesis, Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, 2000).

98 Committee president Jim Coyne in interview: Art Carey, 'In Sculpture, the Irish Saga.' *Philadelphia Enquirer* (Philadelphia), 17 October 2002. See also Chapter 6.

Such issues of blame and recrimination played out on a wide international stage, as manifested in the public spat between the British ambassador John Kerr and New York Governor George Pataki in 1996–7 over the newly adopted New York Famine curriculum, which teaches the Famine alongside slavery and the Holocaust and prompts students to determine whether the Famine can be considered genocide.[99] Grand Marshal John Lahey's emphasis on the 'British genocide' during the 1997 New York City St Patrick's Day Parade sparked similar controversy.[100] Though opinions voiced on issues of genocide and culpability during the 1996 Dáil debates on the Famine commemorations varied (and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's own expressed views made a decisive shift after his transition from opposition leader to head of government responsible for moving ahead peace process talks), Avril Doyle officially rejected the genocidal explanation on behalf of the government.[101] In 1996 David Andrews queried Doyle on her encounters with the genocidal interpretation of the Famine during a American lecture tour in which she took part: 'It is not good for continuing Anglo-Irish relations to term the famine as a deliberate act of genocide.' Doyle agreed:

> [...] it goes way beyond the boundaries of acceptable analysis to argue that there was a genocidal intent on the part of the British Government at the time and that the Irish Famine is therefore directly equivalent to the Holocaust. [...] In my comments in America and elsewhere, I have made my position abundantly clear. The British response during the Famine was entirely inadequate, but the genocidal argument has no validity and this inaccuracy does a disservice both to the victims of the Holocaust or the Famine.[102]

Doyle recently reaffirmed these views, recalling their clash with some Irish American sentiments encountered during the Famine lecture tours run during the 1990s commemorative period:

99 Thomas J. Archdeacon, 'The Irish Famine in American School Curricula.' *Éire-Ireland* 37, Spring/Summer (2002): 130–52; Maureen Murphy and Alan Singer, 'New York State's "Great Irish Famine Curriculum": A Report.' *Éire-Ireland* 37, Spring/Summer (2002): 109–18. A less nuanced Famine curriculum more explicitly advancing the genocidal thesis was also authored in New Jersey by a group called the 'Irish Famine Curriculum Committee', chaired by James Mullin, and adopted in September 1996. See James V. Mullin, 'The New Jersey Famine Curriculum: A Report.' *Éire-Ireland* 37, Spring/Summer (2002): 119–29.

100 David Sapsted, 'British "Genocide" is Theme of NY Parade.' *Irish Independent*, 12 December 1996.

101 Avril Doyle, Dáil Éireann Debates, *Adjournment Debate: Great Famine Commemoration* (19 December 1996), Vol. 473.

102 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Adjournment Debate*.

> Of course we can blame the government of the day for all sorts of things they did wrong about the Famine – you can focus on their lack of action or the types of action they chose at the time – but if you go down the genocide route you lose all credibility in terms of being able to fling the arrows where they deserve to be flung at this issue, against the government of the day. I found when I was in America there was plenty of this sort of stuff too, but it came from a rather extreme nationalist viewpoint, which was totally blinkered in its anti-Britishness […] But any serious thinker among the Irish Americans doesn't subscribe to the genocide theory. It's an arrested development of a certain group of Irish Americans who literally see Ireland as we were, and want to preserve the Ireland that's in their mind – but that culture's gone.[103]

Yet the gap between the official British and Irish governments' position and that of many American commemorative groups has persisted,[104] with John Waters' contribution to *Irish Hunger* succinctly summarizing the latter point of view:

> When you talk about the Famine, you have to cut the bullshit. When I speak about it in public, I make a point of saying, unequivocally, that the Famine was an act of genocide, driven by racism and justified by ideology […] It is the truth […] the truth as we have felt it all our lives.[105]

Though the association of Famine commemoration with ideologies of trauma and genocide runs rife in academic and public accounts from

103 Interview with Avril Doyle (Former Chair, Famine Commemoration Committee), 7 August 2007.

104 The contrast between Mary Robinson's moderate remarks at the unveiling of the Cambridge Famine memorial (1997) and those made by members of the attendant crowd ('It was genocide and it was deliberate') illustrate a common clash: Tom McNiff, 'President Unveils America's Memorial to Famine Victims.' *Irish Independent*, 24 July 1997. Genocidal references from official Irish governmental representatives at commemorative unveilings across the diaspora are rare; usually such views have been voiced by local community leaders or commentators, as in the dedication of the AOH-sponsored Ennistymon Famine memorial in 1995, which saw Edward Wallace (President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians) referring to the famine as a 'genocide': 'Hibernians Remember Million Victims of the Great Famine.' *The Irish Times*, 21 August 1995.

105 John Waters, 'Troubled People.' In *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine*, ed. Tom Hayden (Boulder/Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers/ Wolfhound Press, 1997), 100–11.

the 1990s, viewing the collective monumental output of the same period raises interesting conundrums. Given the ubiquity of the Holocaust as 'a floating signifier',[106] liberally colouring the lenses through which many Famine memories were perceived and publicly expressed, one might expect sculptural engagements with Famine memory to adopt the contemplative or interrogative visual strategies common to Holocaust memorial sites, focusing on issues of displacement, loss, silence and crises of representation.[107] However, any visual correspondence to Holocaust memorialization has proved the exception rather than the rule; such contrasts are particularly striking in diasporic cities (like Boston) where Famine and Holocaust monuments, erected only a few years apart, lie in close physical proximity to one another yet have adopted entirely antagonistic visual approaches. Few Famine memory projects evince the struggle with representation and victim embodiment common to Holocaust memorials, and a fairly standard typology of representation (particularly in the diaspora) has developed based on nineteenth-century heroic modes and nostalgic reification of artefactual fragments of Irish stone and other materials: in the place of the minimal, spare and suggestive there is the theatrical, romantic and explicitly representational. Paradoxically, the visual strategies often associated with a Holocaust 'aesthetic' have been largely rejected by Famine commemorative committees, even as they profess similar objectives.

In any case, the few Irish commemorative projects constructed for overt therapeutic effect have either suffered from poor formal execution, pedantic symbolism, or both. The *Gáirdín an Ghorta* located in Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny (1999) (Fig. 3.3) urges viewers to confront 'the Ghost of the Past – The terrible legacy that the famine has endowed on the Irish psyche has been described as a pain that we have passed silently to one another.'[108] The memorial garden begins with a simulated thatched cottage and moves the viewer on a path through contemplative spaces designated 'Path of the Living', 'Path of the Dead', 'Valley of Sorrows', 'Bridge of Hardship', 'The Silent Era', and finally the 'Garden of Hope and Reconciliation'. More commonly – and particularly in the diaspora – confrontations with the 'inherited memory' of Famine via public monuments have taken the form of communion with experiences of past ancestors, and affirmation of genealogical relationship to the Famine sufferer. Frequently collapsing categories of 'Irish immigrant' and 'Famine victim', they present condensed

106 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 100.

107 James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Young, ed., *The Art of Memory*; Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

108 Gáirdín an Ghorta Committee, *Gáirdín an Ghorta, Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny*, Brochure (2007).

Figure 3.3 *Gáirdín an Ghorta*, Newmarket, Co Kilkenny (1999)

Famine narratives drawn around distinctions of victim and perpetrator – or the suffering of forebears versus the triumph of descendants – embodied via narrative figuration and in inscription.[109]

However, though such representations render a complex history more 'readable' and resonate with strongly held emotions and political convictions, they reinforce the elision of historical difference which characterizes the

109 See Chapter 5. The inscription of an AOH-sponsored Famine monument in Rochester, New York (1997) includes this type of framing: 'To the memory of those millions of Irish who died as a result of The Great Famine of 1845 thru 1850 whose only crime was their heritage and faith […] We must acknowledge and take pride in those who made the voyage of despair across the Atlantic in the coffin ships […] they faced tremendous odds but through their faith never lost sight of the American Dream so future generations could prosper'.

phenomenon of 'postmemory' – the belief that subsequent generations bear particular responsibility for grappling with the experiences and traumas of their forebears, and do so through 'imaginative investment and creation' rather than recollections of lived memory.[110] Yet, as Deborah Long notes:

> the universal availability of the postmemorial position carries the potential for distinctly unethical exploitation [...] Imagination and creation, after all, contain the possibility of unregulated fantasy that need pay no attention at all to either historical accuracy or to the otherness of the other.[111]

Cormac Ó Gráda (one of the more vocal critics of the 'traumatization' of the Famine) has similarly argued that the conflation of diverse and complex nineteenth-century social categories into a single, pitiable class of Famine sufferers oversimplifies and ignores historical reality, and serves to offer 'a version of famine history in which the descendants of those who survived all become vicarious victims'.[112] Exhortations like that of the president of the Irish Psychoanalytical Association in 1998 that 'the public needs to remember and re-live events and then forgive [...] to expunge the hurts of the past'[113] depict the inheritance of the Famine as a collective psychic trauma capable of resolution through acts of memory, defined by the proximity of relationship – indeed of self-identification – sought with the reimagined Famine past.

The production of more than one hundred contemporary monuments to the Famine since the mid-1990s is one testament to this intensely felt desire to bear empathetic witness and fill perceived narrative gaps, as expressed by so many groups and individuals. Many of the visual and material strategies selected convey precisely this aim in their reconstructions of Famine experience and search for 'authentic' visual representations to fill the lacunae of memory. The sincerity of these efforts precludes glib condemnation of such longings, but equally, criticism of trans-generational trauma as hermeneutic legitimately calls into question the political utility, motivation and consequence of such framings. As the imprint of 'Famine trauma' is extrapolated to all manner of cultural characteristics and experience, is the

110 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

111 J.J. Long, 'Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*: Photography, Narrative, and the Claims of Postmemory.' In *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and George Grote (Rochester: Camden House, 2006), 149.

112 Ó Gráda, 'Satisfying a great hunger'. See also Ó Gráda, 'Famine, Trauma and Memory'.

113 Katrina Goldstone, 'Thanks for the Memory.' *The Irish Times*, 21 January 1998.

result paradoxically a diminishment of original suffering? To what extent is it possible to measure the direct cultural legacy and impact of so manifold a historical experience across five or six generations, and what purpose does such an endeavour serve? Does the repetitive revisiting and representation of the 'traumatic Famine experience' since the 1990s constitute symptom, cure or both? Should the Famine be understood as 'an estranging but palpable memory in Irish culture, an insistent force resisting the memorializing gestures and strategic forgetting that have sought to counteract or harness its traumatic effects'[114], or does such a characterization imply a reductive return to the Victorian Famine sublime, where experience exceeds the capacity for articulation, and the agency of the memorializing subject is denied?

The posing of such questions is not intended (entirely) rhetorically, but rather to emphasize that seeking possible answers is contingent on understanding the context of their voicing. Ultimately, the interpretation of the Famine as trauma where commemoration is recommended as a tool for contemporary 'healing' may privilege a perspective that emphasizes the redemptive, not destructive, legacy of the Famine in the service of political exigencies. As Wulf Kansteiner has argued, 'the delayed onset of public debates about the meaning of negative pasts has more to do with political interest and opportunities than the persistence of trauma or with any "leakage" in the collective unconscious.'[115] The assumption of postmemorial responsibility by latter day descendants reveals the actual fragility and indeterminacy of Famine memory, its impulses rooted more firmly in 1997 than 1847. To retrospectively characterize previous generations' relationships with Famine memory as wilful ignorance, deliberate neglect or repressed shame and guilt remains an uncertain proposition, as it sidesteps the fact that the cathartic endgame of much contemporary commemoration is not one that has inspired trans-historic acceptance or belief. As Nuala O Faolain remarked, 'It may be that late twentieth century beliefs about personal pain and the healing of pain will go the way of other great popular faiths';[116] there is every reason to suspect subsequent generations may one day read 150th anniversary Famine memorials as similar relics of a dated ideology.

114 Brewster and Crossman, 'Re-Writing the Famine,' 45.

115 Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory,' 187.

116 Nuala O'Faolain, 'Black Year when Death Brought the Country to its Knees.' *The Irish Times*, 20 January 1997.

Conclusion

Nearly twenty years on from the commencement of the 150th anniversary period, the full history of the enormous range of activity and agency activating so many disparate groups across three continents is yet to be written. In retrospect Ó Gráda's description of a 1990s 'famine fever' that swept the country seems an accurate diagnosis;[117] much work remains to be done in sorting through the after-effects of the Famine's commemoration in all its manifestations, and discerning its reception, impact and subsequent legacy. The extent and diversity of Famine-related theatrical events, lectures, poetry readings, musical performances, television and radio broadcasts, exhibitions, museums and heritage centres, and other initiatives carried out locally, nationally and internationally during the 1990s is truly astonishing.[118] The desire to engage, interpret and consume Famine history and memory was matched by offerings of all kinds, from the serious to the silly: alongside a surge of newly published academic histories one could also purchase children's books (Kerby Miller's pop-up history book/memoir *Journey of Hope* (2001) and Laura Wilson's *How I Survived the Irish Famine* (2000) among many others), kitsch mementoes (such as the *Irish Independent*'s offer of limited edition emigrant collector dolls for £795 per pair), and pay for it all using a limited edition Ancient Order of Hibernians Famine commemorative credit card. Inevitably, some commemorative activity overstepped the bounds of good taste, yet unilaterally characterizing the commemorative period as 'big business'[119] does a disservice to the wider majority of events (often community based) undertaken with no commercial benefit or 'official' funding sources, whose intended and/or realized impact never extended beyond local audiences.

The vast spectrum of commemorative activities and rhetoric during the 1990s offers ample evidence for a remarkable shift in public attitudes towards Famine history and memory, and the range of values which the Famine past now holds in the present. However, if such a plurality of

117 Cormac Ó Gráda, 'After the Famine Fever.' *The Irish Times*, 19 May 2001.

118 Memorials and monuments to the Irish Famine constituted a significant segment of 1990s Famine commemorative activity, but were certainly not the only Famine visualizations of significance: these included art and historical exhibitions, the work of individual contemporary artists (in visual art, theatre, literature, etc.) who during the 1990s directly or indirectly absorbed constructions of Famine memory and meaning into their own practice; and the remarkable number of Famine interpretative centres and museums also launched around the period of the anniversary. For further details on these exhibitions, artists and sites see Crowley, *Representing Ireland's Great Famine*; Mark, *Memorials and Monuments*; Kelly, *History by Proxy*.

119 Foster, *The Irish Story*, 29.

Figure 3.4 International Day of Famine Commemoration, August 2013, at the *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine* (Sydney, 1999) Photo: Jac and Heath Bennett for the Consulate General of Sydney

commemorative discourses affirms the heightened social and political import placed on Famine history and memory since the 1990s, their fractured and conflicted stagings refute contemporaneous declarations of a singular collective 'Famine memory'. The ongoing evolution of Famine commemoration into the post-Celtic Tiger present, now mediated by the economic collapse of 2008 and its effects – renewed levels of outward migration, anxieties and anger over loss of Irish sovereignty, and darkened prospects for future generations – renews conviction that the currency and construction of Famine memory persists as a barometer of social change. We have moved no small distance from the solemn and sparse commemorations of the 1945 Fianna Fáil government, to Michael Flatley's 2005 dance extravaganza *Celtic Tiger* (featuring a Famine sequence complete with scantily rag-clad dancers, projections of burning cottages and mock evictions), to the spectre of contemporary 'ghost estates' now prevalent throughout the recession-struck Irish landscape.

Despite some predictions that Famine memory would quietly exit the commemorative stage (particularly as preparations for the 2016 anniversary of the Easter Rising advanced), significant commemorative activity has continued. In July 2008, after five years of lobbying by the 'Committee for the Commemoration of the Irish Famine Victims' (who have staged an annual

costumed 'Famine walk' centered at the site of Dublin's *Famine* memorial since 2004), a standing National Famine Commemoration Committee was established by Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Éamon Ó Cuív. A National Day of Famine Commemoration was formally adopted by the Irish government in 2009, and has since been structured as a 'twinned' day of ceremony at an Irish and diasporic location – each of them to date (with the exception of Drogheda in 2012) sited at a recently constructed Famine monument (Fig. 3.4).[120] Chaired by Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Jimmy Deenihan, the stated aims of the committee have changed little from those of its 1990s predecessor, apart from added language referencing young people and communities.[121]

The formal adoption of these recurring events and their high profile (with Taoiseach Enda Kenny presiding over the 2012 Drogheda commemoration, and President Michael D. Higgins over Boston's) has been accelerated by awareness of the impending 'decade of commemoration' (2012–22) in Ireland and Northern Ireland, sharp rises in outward migration in the wake of economic recession, and the intensified focus on diaspora evident within various government initiatives in recent years following the Global Irish Economic Fora held at Farmleigh between 2009–11.[122] Famine and migration memory have remained central to such ongoing political efforts, particularly as they relate to foregrounding diasporic relations. As President Michael D. Higgins remarked (rather inaccurately) during a recent tour of Irish American centres and in a series of addresses on historical and contemporary migration, 'Putting the emigrant experience at the centre of our Irishness is something we have yet to do.'[123]

The percolation of 1990s Famine commemorative themes across so many communities of memory (official, academic and public), and their continued presence within public and official activity some two decades later, suggests

120 Commemorative ceremonies to date have included Skibbereen, Co. Cork, Toronto and Grosse Ile (2009); Murrisk, Co. Mayo and New York City (2010); Clones, Co. Monaghan and Liverpool (2011); and Drogheda, Co. Louth and Boston (2012). A permanent series of markers are planned to 'commemorate' the 2012 commemoration held in Drogheda (http://nationalfaminecommemoration2012.blogspot.com/).

121 Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, *Membership of the National Famine Commemoration Committee 2011–2013 (press release)* (Dublin: Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2011).

122 See Brian Cowen, *A Decade of Commemorations: Commemorating Our Shared History* (Speech delivered by An Taoiseach: Institute for British Irish Studies, University College Dublin/Department of the Taoiseach, 20 May 2010). See also Breda Gray, 'Irish State Diaspora Engagement – The "Network State" and "Netizens".' *Éire-Ireland* 47, no. 1/2 (2012), 244–70.

123 Lara Marlowe, 'President's Visit to Irish Centres "the Most Important I Will Make."' *The Irish Times*, 3 May 2012.

there yet remains a deep chord of resonance between the disappearance and destruction of one segment of society, the transformation through emigration of another, and our contemporary selves. In the attempt to harness Famine memory to drive forth various agendas (be they academic, social, political or therapeutic) no simple nor settled answer emerges as to the nature of the relationship between Irish cultural identity and Famine memory, and the myriad ways by which Famine memory, in more than the visual sense, has become monumental.

4
Constructing Famine Spaces in Ireland

In Ireland, unlike so many previous epochs of historical commemorations where local efforts piggy-backed onto or modified narratives enshrined at the national level (as with the 1798 rebellion, Easter Rising, or the First World War), the Famine was an intensely local experience, not one which occurred at a remove from daily life. Today the remnants of that experience pervade the depopulated Irish landscape: abandoned stone cottages, crumbling workhouses and overgrown mass graves, and the endlessly stonewalled and subdivided smallholdings that are testament to the meagre acreage allotted to the Famine poor existing at the very margins of society. At many of these sites, now transformed from no-places to new loci of memory through the act of monumental intervention, the relationship between memory and locality is often intensely direct, performative and territorial: a localized variant of Jan Assmann's 'cultural memory', objectified through the form of the Famine monument placed in spaces highly charged with local meaning and significance.[1] Admittedly, local and rural projects suffered many obstacles to a successful realization: poor levels of funding for public art, lack of awareness of best practice for commissioning and construction, and artistic conservatism have all led to numerous uninspired and insipid public sculptural commemorations. Yet it is not sufficient to describe local memorialization as the poor country relation to sophisticated urban cousins, despite the temptation to do so on artistic grounds.

As Jay Winter has noted in his study of the memorialization of the First World War:

> Despite powerful currents of feeling about the need to express the indebtedness of the living to the fallen and the near-universality of loss in many parts of Europe, commemoration was and remained a

1 Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).

> business, in which sculptors, artists, bureaucrats, churchmen, and ordinary people had to strike an agreement and carry it out.[2]

Although it is prominent monuments (particularly in the diaspora) which have most frequently attracted public response and scholarly analysis, Irish community-level commemorative activity offers unique insights into the prosaic 'business' of commemoration and its outcomes: the functioning of commemorative committees, range of fundraising activities, commissioning of artists, physical construction of the works and their ongoing maintenance reveal much about the significance of the Famine past for agents in the present. These local monuments rarely featured in any kind of national press, and their level of artistic achievement is often too low to warrant any particular praise on aesthetic grounds. However, community memorials exteriorize diverse and frequently more direct views of the social experience and memory of the Famine, deriving both their origins and ongoing significance from the local places they occupy, in ways distinct from urban commissions completed at a further remove. Francoise Choay's observations on the subjective and affective function of monuments further underscore how such social meanings are circumscribed by the emotional and selective needs of their creators and viewers:

> The affective nature of its purpose is essential; it is not simply a question of informing, of calling to mind a neutral bit of information, but rather of stirring up, through the emotions, a living memory [...] the past that is invoked and called forth, in an almost incantatory way, is not just any past; it is localized and selected to a critical end.[3]

Winter and Choay's contrasting yet complementary perspectives on commemorative agency inform the twin trajectories of this chapter's survey of community Famine commemoration in Ireland. The first considers the pragmatic business of commemoration and local memorial-making in Ireland: what is their geographical scope and distribution? What sites and subjects proved most popular, and why? Who was responsible for commissioning these memorials, how were they funded, and who created them? What categories of form emerge? What is the balance of textual and visual interpretation/signification, and what is their source? How have they been received and subsequently maintained? The ephemerality of community monument building has frequently proved a challenge in reconstructing their biographies. Unlike similar projects in the

2 Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 86.

3 Francoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

diaspora, most community Irish memorials usually functioned as discrete acts of commemoration, as committees convened, planned and built the work, then disintegrated after its realization. These works' vulnerability to historical erasure, despite their individual and aggregate import, renders such documentation particularly vital.

The second trajectory cuts through to the substance of the commemorations: what do these memorials mean? What do they say about contemporary attitudes towards the Famine, about local relationships with artefactual residues from the Famine past? How do these memorials negotiate a relationship between Famine past and present, landscape and memory, object and viewer? While some local memorials double as works of art commemorating or meditating on the Famine past, others function explicitly as grave monuments or markers with little aspiration towards visual distinction. In such cases judgements of artistic merit are irrelevant, but as visual and material manifestations of local Famine memories they nonetheless retain essential value within a visual history of the Famine.

At the outset, what can be said about the range of community Famine memorials in Ireland? At least seventy new monuments have been constructed in the Republic since the 1990s, with a broad geographic distribution spanning nearly every county, and a slightly larger proportion located in the southern and western counties.[4] Certainly the west of Ireland endured some of the worst suffering of the Famine period and the devastating impact of mass emigration – its landscape very visibly marked with reminders of dramatic shifts in nineteenth-century agriculture and land ownership – making the higher incidence of Famine memorialization in this region unsurprising. Yet the reclamation of Famine landscapes and sites proved an important dimension of commemorative activity across Ireland, whether locally initiated or prompted by national efforts:

> Throughout 1994 the Great Famine Commemoration Committee, based at Tullamore Co. Offaly, contacted local authorities throughout the Republic of Ireland concerning the location of Famine sites in their respective districts. By December 1994, County Councils [...] had provided the Commemoration Committee with county maps indicating workhouses, fever hospitals, soup kitchens, food depots, Famine road and public works, Famine graveyards and potato ridges.[5]

As further attested by the list of grants awarded by the Famine Commemoration Committee, much of the funding for local commemorative

4 See Appendix; discussion of commemoration in Northern Ireland follows in Chapter 5.
5 Mullan, ed., *A Glimmer of Light*, 48.

projects was driven towards the preservation and restoration of these Famine sites, whether or not they eventually received an additional commemoration in the form of a contemporary Famine monument/memorial. In particular, restored workhouses and cemeteries, often the most compelling existing physical remnants of Famine history in local communities, eventually functioned as the most common sites for contemporary projects.

Unusually for most widespread commemorative movements, the memorialization of the Famine in Ireland has been a largely rural phenomenon, with most monuments located in small towns and villages, often in outlying locations and only very rarely placed in prominent public space. To date no significant Famine memorials have been erected centrally in either Cork or Waterford City; only Dublin and Limerick witnessed the addition of monuments during the mid-1990s, with Galway and Kilkenny receiving commemorations in 2009 and 2010. Although a few were designed with a tourist or external audience in mind, many are devoid of prominent signage and/or permanent interpretative fixtures. The siting of memorials at remote places of local significance, even at the expense of wider appreciation and footfall, suggests a very different relationship with Famine memory than is frequently found in the diaspora, with higher value assigned in Ireland to spatial recovery and reactivation of community memories associated with such sites, over public visibility of memorial activity or delivery of civic 'lessons' in Famine history, for example.

Considered together, the formal diversity of Irish Famine memorials is remarkable (if occasionally odd): examples include bronze figurative groups (as in Roscommon, Co. Roscommon, 1999), high crosses (as in Longford, Co. Longford, 1995), commemorative stones (Carraroe, Co. Galway, 1997), recycled Famine-era artefacts (Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, 1998), reconstructed peasant dwellings (Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny, 1999), memorial gardens (Tuamgraney, Co. Clare, 1997) and even a fountain in the shape of a giant, anatomically correct heart (Limerick, Co. Limerick, 1997). However, the function of many local monuments as memorials to the Famine dead has encouraged conservatism of form and symbol, with crosses, religiously-inflected grave monuments and simple, durable stone markers often (though not exclusively) preferred over works of public art or complex symbolic memorials. Occasionally visual artists were commissioned to create monument designs, but often the modest scale, budget and intent of the markers meant that local funeral monument makers were employed to design and produce the finished memorials. With many monuments standing as proxy or sign for the now-vanished Famine bodies which lie beneath the ground where they stand, figurative monuments in Ireland are few in number. Stone and bronze predominate as materials, and the emotional tenor

of most memorials is keyed at a much more sombre and darker pitch than will be found elsewhere in the diaspora.

Excessive textual interpretation or lists of sponsors/donors are usually eschewed, and in several cases there are no explanatory texts whatsoever – suggesting that these committees considered textual explication of their monuments either unnecessary, inappropriate, or at odds with the intended function of the memorial. Those memorials that do include interpretative text overwhelmingly refer to the impact of the Famine in local terms, laced with occasional reference to general historical facts of the Famine, but focused on specifics of place and the suffering which occurred in the locality. Many also reference historical texts from local archives (letters, workhouse reports, etc.) and include text in Irish, often utilizing local dialects or expressions. Accordingly, most memorials focus not on themes of emigration, renewal or triumph over adversity (as in many diasporic examples), but rather acknowledgment of past neglect of the Famine poor, expressions of sorrow and solemn remembrance (often conveyed through religious symbology and Biblical references), and the direction of viewer attention to the sacred state of Famine spaces. Although the physical form of Famine commemorations in Ireland might best be generalized as restrained, minimal and intimately tied to site, several unusual and evocative examples created by visual artists grant heft and variety to the genre, and stand out as significant works of art in their own right.

Official enthusiasm for commemorative activities in the mid-1990s sparked occasional laments in the Irish media of an emergent 'Famine industry', an instrumentalist charge similarly levelled by historian Roy Foster.[6] Yet the term 'industry' connotes more centrality, structure and figures of dominance than the range of realized community commemorative activity would actually indicate. Rather, the process of memorialization in Ireland bore a fluid and largely grassroots character, highly individualized in particular communities and in proportion to levels of local interest in the anniversary. Whilst the Famine Commemoration Committee and its budget provided a national touchpoint, some funding and the official stamp of approbation, far more local projects were conceived and achieved independently of any real assistance at the national level – quite a number of them predating the existence of the Famine Commemoration Committee altogether. The majority of memorial projects were seeded and developed by small groups of committed local individuals, usually with little or no experience in public art or commemorative activities, and often as outgrowths of local historical or heritage societies. In many cases financial support from local authorities or county councils served as the sole link with official structures, with the initiation of memorial projects in the

6 Foster, *The Irish Story*, 28.

hands of individuals or small collectives, not local government. Much of the funding for these projects derived from a mixture of private, local authority and county council support, with some larger projects (as in Skibbereen, Co. Cork and Knockfierna, Co. Limerick) receiving European Economic Community grants. In comparison with the international activities funded by the Famine Commemoration Committee, disbursements to local groups were comparatively tiny, though broadly distributed.

The significance of the organic and loosely constituted nature of Ireland's Famine commemoration is easy to overlook in subsequent efforts to create a unified portrait of the anniversary period, yet it is crucial to understanding the landscape of Famine memory generated in its wake. As traditional deep knowledge of local topographies and histories has receded, the symbolic recognition and recovery of Famine communal spaces since the 1990s has formed an important form of resistance to the threat of community 'forgetting'. However the varied character and shape of these interventions should not be underestimated, even as strong congruencies emerge. The outcome of the Famine's commemoration across Ireland is a coterie of memorials united in their temporality and subject, divergent in form yet sharing both commonalities and contrasts in theme and reference. Shifting between paradigms of 'official' memory and particularized local memories – towards the final end of a hybrid 'popular' memory – they counter assumptions of a fixed or homogenous Famine commemorative field. Niall Ó Ciosáin's description of the relationships between individual, local and national memories (drawn through his studies of Irish folklore and Famine narratives) in this context proves most useful:

> The projection of the national experience onto localities conflates nation and locality in the same ways as the various psychological accounts we saw earlier conflated the individual and the national. The dynamics of memory are not the same at the three levels, and there is no unitary 'memory of the Famine'. We need to consider how each level works and relates to the others in order to make judgements about how the Famine has been remembered.[7]

Accordingly, this chapter divides the subject of local Irish Famine memorials into three themed sections – site, presence and performance – each of which explores the mechanics and poetics of memorialization across a few selected examples. 'Site' considers the origin, rationale and consequence of siting memorials in cemeteries, workhouses and other spaces historically marked by social stigmatization. Utilizing the potency of the Irish landscape as referent

7 Ó Ciosáin, 'Was there "Silence" about the Famine?,' 9–10.

and raw material, such memorials preserve and reinterpret Famine residues and ruins, signalling how the Famine victim remains 'othered' in contemporary as well as historical Ireland, even as these sites have formed the bedrock of efforts to shape a local and national Famine heritage. 'Presence' addresses the omnipresence of the 'Famine body' and how community groups have dealt with issues of negation and figuration at memorial sites, creating new visual/material presences from absence, and deploying symbolic and figurative strategies in the service of commemoration. 'Performance' examines how the commemorative act inscribes and determines its product – the rescuing of abandoned spaces and the vigilance to sustain them against time and decay, the ceremony and rituals attending their narration, and the pragmatic processes of monument construction – all of which underline the importance of agency in Famine remembering (and forgetting). Irrespective of the framing device used to interpret these memorials, the range of community Famine commemoration realized in Ireland since 1990 remains a remarkable phenomenon deserving of greater attention than it has received to date; no other Irish pre-modern historical event has commanded such levels of public attention nor equalled the scale of its memorial output in recent times. These memorials offer a material record of local attention to Famine history, of new forms of engagement and representation of complex historical and memorial subjects, and of the extraordinary contemporary value placed on the commemorative enterprise.

Site: the workhouse and graveyard

> […] every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework […] space alone is a reality that endures […] we can recapture the past only by understanding how it is preserved in our physical surroundings.[8]

Acknowledging the physical legacy of the Famine in Ireland is no straightforward task, and its local monumentalization within the communities historically transformed by its cataclysmic effects is fraught with potential pitfalls; as Patrick Duffy has observed, 'local place is culturally significant and deeply territorial'.[9] Driving along minor roads on the outskirts of small towns across Ireland a familiar set of structures frequently enters the frame: a hospital or convalescent home, converted from an old building; a

8 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980), 140.

9 Patrick Duffy, 'Change and Renewal in Issues of Place, Identity and the Local.' In *Engaging Spaces: People, Place and Space from an Irish Perspective*, ed. Jim Hourihane (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2003), 13–29.

low lying wall adjacent to the road, enclosing a grassy field with no apparent agricultural or recreational purpose. This pair of structures, the former workhouse and Famine cemetery, are among the most prominent physical remains of the Famine past visible in contemporary Ireland. In 1838 the Poor Relief Act (following similar legislation in England and Wales) divided Ireland into 130 Unions, each a separate administrative district combining several towns and localities, charged with the construction and operation of a public workhouse governed by a local Board of Guardians.[10] It was here that relief would be offered to the poor of the district, subsidised by a poor law tax levied on local landowners and rate-payers. The English architect George Wilkinson was engaged to oversee the design and construction of all 130 new workhouses,[11] hence their similarity of siting and uniform appearance.

From its inception the Poor Law and workhouse system in Ireland proved a controversial social reform, designed to shift financial responsibility for support onto landowners and attempting to standardize government-aided relief for the poor across districts. Its association with despondency and social humiliation was intentional: the forbidding architecture, forced separation of families, cramped and regimented living conditions and strict tests of admission were meant to discourage entry except for the most desperate cases, and in any event only eight were designed to hold more than 1,000 people. As a form of charitable aid the workhouse was a product of mixed and conflicting ambitions: to perform a Christian duty of care for the poor, while also serving as a deterrent against the sort of moral weakness which led to extreme poverty – all at the smallest financial cost possible. Not surprisingly, the workhouse system proved so unpopular that by 1846 they lay half empty, even in the face of persistent and endemic poverty.[12]

Such a despised and flawed system proved disastrous with the onset of the Famine, as the workhouses became the last refuge of evicted and starving multitudes, and were unprepared to deal with the scale of the catastrophe. Minutes of the workhouses' Boards of Guardians extant across the country detail frantic efforts to cope with the waves of applicants for admission, the rampant disease and high mortality as a result of unsanitary conditions and malnutrition, and the growing problem of hygienic burial, not to mention the depleted financial resources available to address the crisis. As the Famine continued even efforts to provide a coffin and sufficient

10 Peter Gray, *The Making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Virginia Crossman, *The Poor Law in Ireland 1838-1948* (Dublin: Dundalgan Press, 2006). See also Section III, 'The Workhouse.' In Crowley, Smyth, and Murphy, eds., *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, 120–67.

11 John O'Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland: The Fate of Ireland's Poor* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1995), 77–93.

12 O'Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland,* 120.

burial were abandoned, as administrators opened new mass graves (often nicknamed 'Bully's' or 'Croppy's' Acre) and dispensed with practices of burying workhouse inmates in central churchyards. The obscenity of many workhouse burials horrified observers of the time and their descendants, who recalled scavenging dogs and dismembered bodies, bodies dumped into shallow graves in huge pits, and communal coffin contraptions used by workhouse contractors to speed up burials.[13] In addition to eyewitness accounts from contemporary reports, transgressions of burial customs and practices during the Famine years form a recurrent theme of recollections recorded in the 1945 Famine Survey and other twentieth-century material collected by the Irish Folklore Commission.[14] The proliferation of graphic and distressing narrations of the spectacle of mass burial – and their persistence in folk and popular memory – reveals the deep significance attached to rituals of death, and the social collapse associated with the dissolution of boundaries between the living and the dead.[15]

Several of these graveyards continued to be used beyond the Famine period for other 'unconsecrated' burials of individuals on the margins of society – suicides, unbaptized children and unidentified bodies – in some cases (such as the auxiliary mass cemetery in Douglas, Co. Cork) well into the mid-twentieth century.[16] The practice of separate burial for deaths 'deviant' from normal conditions – and the liminal position their graves occupied, both physically and spiritually – ensured that such cemeteries often remained locally known, yet not actively commemorated or drawn into local religious observance and upkeep.[17] That many workhouse and other mass gravesites were (and are) both visible and 'othered' within their communities is evident from their condition leading up to the 1990s, where they often remained walled off or undeveloped, sometimes even in the midst of new housing estates (as in the case of Enniskillen and Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh).

13 Roger J. McHugh, 'The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition.' In *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52*, ed. R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1956), 391–436.

14 Seán O Súilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (Dublin: Folklore of Ireland Society, 1942); Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995).

15 See also McLean, *The Event and its Terrors*, Ch. 6, 'In the Theatre of Death', 94–111.

16 The reverse is also true, as zones previously used for separate burial – such as *cillín*, or children's graves, marked out since the medieval period – were re-used for Famine-era interments. Nyree Finlay, 'Outside of Life: Traditions of Infant Burial in Ireland from Cillín to Cist.' *World Archaeology* 31, no. 3 February (2000): 407–22. See also Emer A. Dennehy and Linda G. Lynch, 'Unearthed Secrets: A Clandestine Burial-Ground.' *Archaeology Ireland* 15, no. 4 Winter (2001): 20–23. An example of this layered use may be found in Carraroe, Co. Galway, where a monument erected in 1997 marks the site of Trá na bPáistí/The Children's Strand, both a *cillín* and Famine burial site.

17 Finlay, 'Outside of Life,' 408–11.

Of the 163 workhouses still standing at the end of the Famine, many were destroyed during the War for Independence and Civil War or simply abandoned; by the late 1920s, thirty-three of the remaining workhouses had been transformed into county homes and forty-one into hospitals.[18] Other strange destinies awaited the hated structures: Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath's workhouse functioned for many years as a converted B&B, Ballinasloe's (Co. Galway) became a Tesco supermarket, and in Rathkeale (Co. Limerick) the former workhouse now houses a beef processing plant.[19]

Despite their lingering presence, prior to the 1990s Famine graves and workhouses attracted little sustained public attention; none of the larger societies for grave preservation, such as Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead (active from 1888 to 1931) or the National Graves Association expressed any interest in such sites. Judging from the tiny number of pre-Famine monuments and preservation efforts predating the 1990s, levels of local interest were similarly low. However, from the 1990s onwards, fear of these sites' obliteration by modern urban development during Ireland's economic boom,[20] dismay at the current state of graveyards, and anxieties provoked by guilt and shame over their neglect prompted several local committees into action; in Clones Co. Monaghan, for example, the Famine gravesite was commemorated as a preventative measure by a local group to forestall a planned housing development.[21] Other gravesites (as in Tralee, Tuamgraney and Ballinasloe) were developed from formerly overgrown non-places into manicured, specifically delineated 'contemplation' spaces, or leisure areas for hospital patients now resident at the former workhouse. Much subsequent attention was stimulated by the vocal and well-publicized campaign by Action From Ireland (led by Joe Duffy and Don Mullan) to 'publicly honour Ireland's several hundred unmarked mass "Famine" graves with dignity and reverence' and call for 'a commitment to have them cared for after the anniversary years'.[22] A number of workhouses

18 O'Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland*, 199.

19 Peter Higgenbotham's excellent website traces the history of workhouses in Ireland, England and Scotland, and includes many photographs of their contemporary states: http://www.workhouses.org.uk/

20 Nuala O'Faolain, 'I Know we're in the Grip of Moneymaking but we can't just Bulldoze our Ancestors.' *Sunday Tribune*, 10 October 2005.

21 Interview with Peter McClave (Chairman, Clones Famine Commemoration Committee), 23 July 2007.

22 Mullan, ed., *A Glimmer of Light*, 32, 33. AfrI-sponsored or supported monuments at the site of Famine graveyards include examples in Swinford Co. Mayo, Callan Co. Kilkenny, Clones Co. Monaghan, and Kells Co. Meath (see Appendix). Efforts to document Famine-era workhouses and graveyards have continued: Action from Ireland. *They All Had Names: a Survey of Tithe na mBocht and Famine Graveyards in Ireland* (Dublin: AfrI, 2013).

were also locally transformed into heritage sites for the visiting public, including the Dunfanaghy Workhouse Heritage Centre (Co. Donegal, 1995) and Donaghmore Workhouse (Co. Laois, 1997).[23]

Funding for graveyard/workhouse commemorations came from a diversity of sources, but more often than not was heavily subsidized by private local fundraising. At least twenty Famine graveyard/workhouse renovations were funded by the National Famine Commemoration Committee between 1995 and 1997, although most grants were modest (nearly all at £1,000, with the exception of the Eamonn O'Doherty-designed commemoration in Enniskillen, which received £5,000).[24] Though this equalled almost half of the total number of project grants given by the Famine Commemoration Committee, the proportion of the budget allocated to these endeavours was in reality less than 5%. It is important to reiterate in this context that the initiative for the majority of these memorial projects derived almost exclusively from local efforts, not from intervention on the part of local authorities or county councils (although such support was often subsequently sought and received).

These places powerfully convey the desolation and starkness of the Famine, their peripheral locations mirroring the stigmatized status of the workhouse, as well as the inability of society to contain the scale of death and suffering within normative boundaries. The re-situating of the Famine's manifold tragedies and violations into a socially approved, visible space – symbolized by the conversion of mass gravesites into respectful zones of remembrance, or the insertion of familiar emblems (crosses, plaques of remembrance) into these formerly wild and forgotten places – has drawn its memory into the realm of public commemorative culture, now pointedly receiving the attentions of church, state and community so often denied its direct victims. The centring of so many local Irish commemorations at sites of burial further points to the ongoing importance of formalized and publicly visible funeral rituals, particularly in rural communities. On a more pragmatic note, the sites' dereliction and/or abandonment meant few groups encountered opposition to their plans to renovate or install new monuments, and only sporadically did any of the usual procedural checks occur which are common to other public sculptural projects (such as the involvement of local arts officers or open competitions for designs), meaning the final formal outcome of many projects can best be described as mixed in quality. But what are the consequences of transplanting

23 Efforts to restore and revive former workhouses (for both heritage and creative/commercial purposes) have continued; developments in progress include the Portumna Workhouse Centre (Co. Galway) and the Workhouse Studios (Co. Waterford).

24 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Written Answers – Famine Commemoration (Details of Projects Funded to Date)* (26 March 1997), Vol. 477.

the Famine dead from alterity to centre, of transforming Famine place into commemorative space? The remainder of this section will consider two memorial examples which have enacted this process: the first, a monument in Douglas, Co. Cork located at the site of the auxiliary cemetery for Cork Union Workhouse, and the second an attempt to resurrect a 'Famine village' on Knockfierna Hill in Ballingarry, Co. Limerick through restoration of its surviving structures into monuments to the Famine.

Douglas, Co. Cork

Just off the busy N28 road from Cork to Carrigaline, near the village of Douglas outside of Cork City, a small, weather-beaten sign points the way to All Saints' Cemetery. Livestock gates prohibit entry along the path that leads to the cemetery and permission is needed from the adjoining farmhouse; once beyond the gates an old watering trough and a break in its surrounding stone wall serves as the only access point to the now-overgrown burial ground. In the centre of the field rises a remarkable structure: an enormous, perforated metal cross with two stone plaques at its base. No other visible tombstones or manmade structures mark the space as a graveyard. Today the site is peaceful and remote, its setting revealing little of the tumultuous circumstances surrounding its creation and subsequent use.[25]

The blight hit County Cork with particular severity after 1846; the extreme distress of people in nearby Skibbereen attracted international attention and became emblematic of the horrific conditions and high mortality rates suffered by the landless poor. Like many others, Cork's workhouse suffered from immense overcrowding, with 5,300 paupers squeezed into facilities designed for 2,000 by February 1847.[26] By early 1847 Cork's cemeteries were bursting at the seams; an estimated 13,000 people (8,000 of them paupers) were buried during the first nine months of 1847 alone at St Joseph's cemetery, in Ballyphehane.[27] As a consequence of the mounting Famine deaths the Guardians of the Cork Workhouse placed an advertisement in 1846 for a new burial ground; Carr's Hill, a private 3-acre area of land outside the city, was offered by George Carr as a suitable burying ground to alleviate the crisis: '[it] contains about 5½ acres, is well fenced, has an

25 For concise histories of the site see Daniel Hegarty and Brian Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard on Carr's Hill near Cork.' *Journal of Cork History and Society* 101 (1996): 9–14; Colman O'Mahony, *In the Shadows: Life in Cork 1750–1930* (Cork: Tower Books, 1997), 163–4. Information about Carr's Hill may also be found in the minute books of the Cork Union Board of Guardians from 10 November 1845-7 July 1847; unfortunately, the minutes between 7 July 1847 and 21 March 1849 are missing from the Cork City Archives.

26 Minutes of the Cork Union Board of Guardians, 20 February 1847.

27 O'Mahony, *In the Shadows*, 163.

abundance of surface and depth of soil and is very eligibly situated'.[28] The site was accepted, and burials began in February 1847. For the price of 2s 6d per corpse, paid by the Board of Guardians, Carr transported and buried the bodies from the workhouse.[29]

Complaints about the state of the graveyard (nicknamed 'Carr's Hole') and Carr's burial practices promptly surfaced in local papers, as editorials published in the *Cork Constitution* graphically criticized the site: an overpowering stench hung over the area, and dogs were disinterring the bodies and scattering human remains over the shallow ground, where bodies were sometimes buried within a foot of the surface.[30] An investigation launched by the Board of Guardians against George Carr cited him for creating a public nuisance: testimony included allegations of coffins stacked one upon the other, a 'sickening effluvia' emanating from the area, and human intestines torn out of bodies and left at the hole.[31] Although Carr was eventually found guilty of the offence, the Board of Guardians had little alternative but to continue using Carr's Hill. During the month of August, between Carr's conviction and the decision to resume use of his graveyard, decaying corpses had piled up in the workhouse; without a suitable location for burial, the workhouse master admitted he'd 'sent them out late at night and got rid of them somewhere'.[32] The Board of Guardians again advertised for a burial site, and despite Carr's repeated misconduct and three-month suspension for poor management of the site, he was again awarded the contract, and his land leased for 999 years.

The outcry raised over the cemetery as a health hazard in the 1840s was unquestionably well-founded, yet the community's anxieties had other bases as well. From the beginning Carr's Hill embodied the moral and practical dilemmas facing relief committees and workhouses. As letters to the *Cork Examiner* and *Constitution* attest, the spectacle of improper burial and disrespect for human remains horrified local residents; the appearance of coffins by roadsides was deplored and the carts transporting bodies criticized for their stench and offensive appearance, the latter complaint resolved by Douglas officials ordering the transport of bodies at night.[33] Testimony during the Douglas Petty Sessions referenced travellers who chose circuitous routes in order to avoid contact with the site;[34] bodies once integrated into the larger space of a churchyard were now isolated (geograph-

28 Minutes of the Cork Union Board of Guardians, 18 January 1847.
29 Minutes of the Cork Union Board of Guardians, 23 June 1847.
30 Hegarty and Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard,' 10–11.
31 *Cork Examiner*, 8-9 July 1847.
32 Hegarty and Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard,' 13.
33 Hegarty and Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard,' 13.
34 O'Mahony, *In the Shadows*, 163–4.

Figure 4.1 Douglas Famine memorial being assembled at William Sorenson's home, Victoria Road, Cork (1958). Image courtesy of *Irish Examiner*

Famine Memorial, William Sorenson (1958)/plaques added (1997), Carr's Hill, Douglas, Co. Cork
Cork Civic Trust/
An Gorta Mór Famine Commemoration Committee.
Photograph of plaque unveiling ceremony (1997) courtesy of Patrick Gunn

ically and symbolically) and further stigmatized as the detritus of society. Citizens' public complaints in contemporaneous media convey less a sense of identification with the dying poor, and more distress at the site itself as a blight on the community, a space where the standards of human decency were routinely violated. The cemetery's woes did not end with the potato blight; years later Carr's Hill acquired a reputation as the destination for paupers' bodies only after they had been subjected to dissection by Queen's College medical faculty. It was alleged as late as 1912 that some workhouse inmates chose conversion to Protestantism to avoid the ignominy of burial at Carr's Hill (Protestants were buried at St Finbarr's cemetery).[35] The Carr's Hill cemetery continued to be used for abandoned and stillborn children and unknown individuals until the 1940s; the name was later changed to All Saints' Cemetery, and has not been used for burials for over forty years.[36]

The space fell into quiet oblivion until 1958, when local taxi driver William Sorenson (also known as Jack) erected a 54-foot high galvanized steel cross, the present monument today visible from the roadside (Fig. 4.1). Sorenson built the cross in his own back garden for £400 (contributed by friends and from his own funds) and the monument was dedicated on 2 November in the presence of a large community gathering.[37] Described as a 'colourful character', Sorenson purportedly took personal responsibility for illuminating the cross every evening until his death in 1979.[38] The unusually large and elevated structure is simply built, a frame of intersecting metal bars covered with sheets of perforated metal, welded together with stabilizing wires radiating from the structure to the ground. No information remains at the site as to the monument's original purpose or the history of the cemetery, though the choice of the monumental cross form suggests some possible influence from the spate of large rural crosses which appeared during the Marian Year in 1954. No further changes were made to the site until 1997, when the Cork Civic Trust and the local An Gorta Mór Famine Commemoration Committee undertook a renovation of the site and erected two small stone monuments to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the

35 O'Mahony, *In the Shadows*, xii.

36 Hegarty and Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard,' 13–14.

37 'Cork Memorial to Famine Dead Blessed.' *Cork Examiner*, 3 November 1958. Sorenson also assisted in building the original illumination system for the Holy Rosary Shrine located on the Lee Road, Cork in 1955 (now replaced).

38 Kieran McCarthy, 'Emergence of the Modern City: Nineteenth Century Cork (Part 28). Carr's Hill: The Graveyard of the Unknown.' *Inside Cork*, 17 May 2001, 14. The cross' illumination did not function for many years, but was restored in 2012 by Airtricity thanks to the efforts of the Cork and County Famine Group, headed by current chair Pat Gunn. My thanks to Gunn for providing details of the cemetery's history and preservation efforts.

Famine: one to the memory of Sorenson, and the other marking the occasion of the cemetery's rededication by Jean Kennedy Smith in 1997.

The two sets of memorials (Sorenson's and the 1997 markers) present a contrast of intent and affect. Sorenson's large and highly visible monument challenges the site's relegation to the fringes of social memory and care, attempting to normalize the site and draw it into public consciousness through the addition of a recognizable Christian memorial symbol. Without any additional interpretative material or signage, this act of commemoration was directed towards a local community where the site's history must have been known to many, if rarely acknowledged – a striking gesture during a period when formalized rituals of death and the importance of consecrated ground retained tremendous social value within a deeply Catholic country. The two contemporary monuments added in 1997 are a far more subdued affair. One commemorates Sorenson and his own remembering of place:

> To the memory of / Mr. Jack Sorensen / Cork taxi driver / Who single handedly erected / This cross, so that our famine dead / Would be remembered / An gorta mor / Famine Commemoration Committee / 1997

whilst the other inscription acknowledges the Famine's sesquicentenary, flanked by an incised image of a ringed cross:

> 150th Anniversary / *An Gorta Mor* / In memory of the thousands of Cork / people who died during / the Great Famine / and are buried here / Go ndeana dia trocaire orthu / Unveiled by / Jean Kennedy Smith U.S.A. / Erected by / The Cork Remembrance Committee / 2nd June 1997

Intriguingly, the only other person named through inscription (aside from Sorenson) is Jean Kennedy Smith – signalling the resonance the Kennedy surname continues to command as a mark of Irish pride and success wrought in the wake of the Famine (all of Kennedy's great-grandparents emigrated to the U.S. in the 1840s). Though the presence of dignitaries at monument unveiling ceremonies is a common enough occurrence, the decision to prominently include Jean Kennedy Smith's name on the permanent inscription suggests an attempt by the committee to align their commemoration within nationalized narratives of Famine heritage – indeed the Kennedys have little direct connection with Cork. Where Sorenson's cross memorial strikes the viewer as intensely personal, provocative and poignant (in spite of, or even because of its homemade construction), the recent monuments seem a poor legacy left from the 150th anniversary. This

impression is exacerbated by the current state of the cemetery – which has once again largely reverted to an unkempt and wild space – and the severe weathering that rendered the 1997 monuments nearly illegible.[39]

Carr's Hill is not the only mass burial ground in Cork; in fact it probably holds fewer victims than St Joseph's cemetery a few miles away, and St John's cemetery on Douglas Street is the most centrally located cemetery in Cork, which received Famine burials in the 1840s (neither of which possessed or received markers during the 1990s).[40] Yet it is this particular site that has commanded commemorative attention, both in 1958 by Sorenson and again in 1997; it was further cited in 2001 as a 'relic' to be restored, as 'surely it has large tourist potential'.[41] Despite such optimism, the neglected and remote graveyard seems little changed today from its days as 'Carr's Hole'; the odds of the casual visitor discovering the meaning of its monuments located behind locked livestock gates and across muddy fields are slim. Carr's Hill in many ways embodies the paradox of commemorating the Famine burial ground: that it is the unknowable nature of this Famine landscape, the anonymity of its inhabitants and their history of segregation, which grant it value and significance within the framework of the 150th anniversary, even as the facts of its creation (and history of explicit stigmatization) resist such forms of memory. Its peripheral location, that vital factor which determined its taboo status in the nineteenth century and inspired its commemoration in the twentieth, may yet serve to work against preservationist notions and preclude any easy assimilation into the present.

Knockfierna, Co. Limerick

The highest hill in Limerick near the village of Ballingarry, '*Cnoc Firinne*' (anglicized as Knockfeerina or Knockfierna) was believed to have been the home of Donn Firinne, pre-Christian god of truth and the underworld; it is a place replete with sites of pre-Christian importance and layered with centuries of local mythology and folklore.[42] Before the Famine in the early

39 Recent restoration efforts have begun again after a long period of dormancy: Leo McMahon, 'A Mark of Respect.' *The Southern Star*, 23 July 2011.

40 Efforts to continue using St John's for Famine burials in February 1847 met with 'a near riot. Local residents objected to the interment of paupers in their cemetery both because of the health hazard it represented and because they resented the 'dumping' of paupers amongst their dead relatives.' Hegarty and Hickey, 'The Famine Graveyard,' 10. In 2009 a new Famine memorial in St Joseph's cemetery was erected by Cork City Council.

41 McCarthy, 'Emergence of the Modern City,' 14.

42 Details of Knockfierna's history and development are derived from Cnoc Firinne Heritage and Folklore Group, *Knockfierna Remembers the Famine Years*, vol. 7 (Ballingarry: Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group, 1997), and interviews with group members (and local historians) Noel Carmody and Pat O'Donovan (2003/2007).

1840s Knockfierna was settled by tenants seeking refuge in the wake of evictions from the nearby Cox estate; between 1841 and 1845 the population swelled from 629 to more than 1,000 residents. Using locally available stone, small cabins were erected over an area of approximately 200 acres; while the land was held in commonage and thus available to the poor, its poor soil offered meagre subsistence levels and promoted dependency on the potato, proving disastrous when the Famine struck in 1845.

Reports in local newspapers describe the distress wreaked on the district by the onset of the Famine; with nearby workhouses in Kilmallock, Newcastle West and Rathkeale struggling to cope, Knockfierna developed a reputation for wretchedness, social exclusion and violent resistance. In May 1847 over 2,000 gathered on the slope of Knockfierna for an aborted uprising; other reports detail frequent attacks on food stores and cattle thievery in Ballingarry and the surrounding local area. As relief efforts failed to stem the misery of the poor, Knockfierna's population dropped by 1851 to 400; by 1911 only eighty-one residents remained. Ironically, the 'commonage' status of Knockfierna that enabled its dense population during the Famine also ensured its preservation into the present day; as local historian Noel Carmody remarked, 'everybody owns it, and nobody owns it.'[43] Today the hill features one of the best-preserved examples of a Famine-era village; foundations of around forty dwellings (out of approximately 200) remain intact, and former potato lazy-beds are clearly visible in several places on the hillside.

Efforts to acknowledge the site's historic importance began in the mid-1980s, when local businessman Pat O'Donovan and other residents formed the Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group. Upkeep of the extant Famine dwellings and research into its nineteenth-century history continued sporadically until 1994, when the group received a £200,000 FÁS grant aimed at restoring the village.[44] Between 1994 and 1995 the grant was used to rebuild twelve of the Famine cottages, involving twenty-two people on the scheme (Fig. 4.2). The foundations of cabins still intact were used to reconstruct them, walls were rebuilt, timber A-frame roofs restored and some re-thatching completed. In June 1998 the park was officially opened and a large limestone marker unveiled by Arts and Culture Minister Síle de Valera, engraved with a poem by Michael Hogan and an extract from a letter from the Archdeacon of Ballingarry (published in *The Limerick Chronicle*

43 Interview with Noel Carmody (Treasurer, Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group), 3 April 2003.

44 An additional £7,000 was also received by the group from the National Famine Commemoration Committee in 1996–7.

In Memory Of Those
WHO SUFFERED AND DIED
IN THIS DISTRICT
DURING THE GREAT FAMINE
1845-1851
'TWAS IN RUTHLESS FORTY-SEVEN,
WHEN THE PLAGUE-FRAUGHT AIR WAS RIVEN
WITH THE SOUND WHICH HARROWED HEAVEN,
OF A FAMISHED PEOPLE'S CRY
WHEN THE FAMINE FIEND WAS FORMED
ALL WITH TENFOLD HORRORS ARM'D,
AND OUR GODLESS RULERS, CHARMED,
SAW THEIR IRISH VICTIMS DIE,
WHILE EUROPE, ALL ALARM'D
HEARD THE WAIL THAT TORE THE SKY
A DYING NATION'S DEATH-GROAN.
RINGING UP TO GOD ON HIGH.
MICHAEL HOGAN - THE Bard of Thomond 1832-1899
SOLAS NA SOILSE AGUS RADHARC NA TRIONOIDE
DOIBH SIUD GO LEIR A d'FHULAING
CRUATAN, OCRAS AGUS FIABHRAS,
AGUS A FUAIR BAS LE LINN AN GHORTA
SA CHEANTAR SEO
AGUS AR FUD NA hEIREANN UILIG
"The able bodied, or those who were such before hunger and misery
had made them stooping feeble, ghastly scare crows, are receiving
at present outdoor relief at the same rate as the others. But
all males between sixteen and sixty are required in return for
these fifteen sixteenths of a penny, to spend eight hours breaking
stones in the open air. Most of these are in rags, as may be
supposed-all of them emaciated and enfeebled by a penny-a-day
diet, cold and misery. This test, as it is called, was introduced
in the middle of January. What a fine thing it must be to be a
partaker of all the blessings of the British constitution-a poor
man can obtain fifteen sixteenths of a penny on the easy condition
of breaking stones for only eight hours on a bleak hillside with
his miserable clothing searched by the frost blast, or drenched in
the sleet of january; that some must fall victims to a test of
this description is inevitable.The transition from the bleak
hillside of knockfierna to the coffinless grave in the church yard
of Ballingarry, is a transition as common and indeed natural that
it attracts no attention and excites no sensation."
MICHAEL FITGERALD R.C., Archdeacon P.P. Ballingarry
25th March, 1848.
O'CONNOR
J. C. W
UNVEILED BY SILE DE VALERA T.D
MINISTER FOR ARTS, HERITAGE, GAELTACHT & THE ISLANDS
14 JUNE 1998
ERECTED BY KNOCKFIERNA HERITAGE AND FOLKLORE GROUP

Figure 4.2 *Knockfierna Famine Commemoration Park*, Ballingarry, Co. Limerick (1998)
Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group

in 1848) describing the distress of people in the locale and pleading for intervention on their behalf.

Though developed as a wholly local project, the committee's aspiration was for Knockfierna's restored village to achieve national significance, reflected in the name chosen for the site, the 'National Famine Commemoration Park'. In 1994 a newspaper report called the restoration project an 'exciting venture [that] could become a major tourist attraction with proper financial backing'.[45] Unfortunately, lobbying for the site to receive special focus proved unsuccessful, despite calls made in 1995 by local politicians in the Dáil and the Seanad to establish Knockfierna as the site for the proposed national memorial to the Famine (at that stage still under review by the government; the designation would eventually go to Murrisk, Co. Mayo and John Behan's *Famine Ship*).[46] In interview chairman of the committee Pat O'Donovan voiced his frustration with the support from local tourist authorities for their lack of interest in promoting Knockfierna.[47] However, the exigencies of developing and maintaining a tourism destination would have been difficult to reconcile with the sentiments expressed by committee members, who were (and remain) adamant that conversion of the site into a tourist attraction, complete with interpretative centre and all the usual trappings of such initiatives, would be highly inappropriate and disrespectful at the site:

> The National Famine Commemoration Park at Knockfierna is also unique in that it stands simply as a quiet tribute to those who lived and died there […] There will be no charge, no shops or restaurants. We believe that it would be inappropriate to profit from the poverty and misfortune of our ancestors. All we ask from visitors is respect for this sacred place.[48]

Although derided by Roy Foster as a 'Famine Theme Park',[49] this description suggests little first-hand acquaintance with the actual site, which is not signposted and only in a partial state of restoration. The title chosen for the committee's project (the National Famine Commemoration Park)

45 Brian McLaughlin, 'Last Famine Village Rises to New Life from Ruins.' *The Sunday Press*, 10 July 1994.

46 Seanad Éireann, *Adjournment Matters – Famine Monument* (19 September 1995), Vol. 144; Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine: Statements.*

47 Interview with Pat O'Donovan (Chairman, Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group), 30 July 2007.

48 Cnoc Firinne Heritage and Folklore Group, *Knockfierna Remembers the Famine Years*, 3.

49 Foster, *The Irish Story*, 29.

unfortunately conjures images of carefully spaced and aestheticized Famine cabins, replete with characters in period dress delivering awkward historical re-enactments – none of which matches the isolated and stark reality. For Knockfierna the name was likely intended to draw the site under the umbrella of national commemorative efforts, affirming its committee's belief in the singularity of the site and its potential as an important site of memory, as well as attracting funding for continued restoration. However, as demonstrated by the diversity of memorial projects surveyed by this chapter, the experience of the Famine is fractured, varied and uneven across Ireland – complicating any attempt to package it into a unified heritage product, and perhaps precipitating hostile responses to Knockfierna's efforts despite its actual low-key and sensitive execution. For the moment, however, the site is only accessible via a dirt track forking off from the main Ballingarry road; as such it is highly unlikely the site would draw passing traffic or visitors not already somewhat acquainted with the site.

The aesthetic resonance of ruins within the landscape – physical reminders of human presence and of vanished cultures, redolent of mortality and the transience of life – has long been a staple within pictorial and architectural traditions. In Ireland this tradition found expression through the activities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarians who eventually succeeded in adding such monuments as the round tower, high cross and megalith to the national lexicon of cultural signifiers. On a less exalted scale, the stone cottage has alternately been adopted as a symbol of the perpetuation of Irish rural tradition in the face of aggressive modernity, the cruelty of English occupation and landlord eviction, or the sublime 'unspoilt' Irish landscape where such ruins are viewed as Romantic symbols of picturesque decay. The diversity of such signification makes plain the conflicted and problematic status of cottages' iconographic meaning, yet their memorial quality as Famine signifier finds unbroken expression from the nineteenth century through to the present day.[50] The reconstruction of Knockfierna's dwellings draws from this mélange of associations: to reconstruct the cabins entirely would negate the passage of time and paradoxically destroy evidence of their destruction, but for a committee intent on affirming the contemporary value placed on this space, the option of *not* intervening in some way seems inconceivable. Ironically, it is the lack of development and further interpretative frameworks that allow the site to retain its emotional affect, when compared with other local projects which less effectively and more

50 Numerous examples of memorials inspired by the cottage structure are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6; see also Robin Lydenberg, 'From Icon to Index: Some Contemporary Visions of the Irish Stone Cottage.' In *Éire - Land* (Chestnut Hill, MA: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 127–34.

cloyingly attempt to reconstruct the rural Famine experience, such as the Famine cottage 'garden' (*Gairdín an Ghorta*) reconstructed in Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny (1999), or 'living history' initiatives like the Doagh Famine Village in Donegal.

The presence of the reconstructed dwellings and memorial stone reinforces the perimeters of this Famine space, marking the literal gulf between the isolated Knockfierna dwellers and the body of mainstream society in the townlands below. The orientation of the new commemorative monument towards the valley (as the viewer faces outwards, not inwards) implicitly recalls the segregation of the hill community, as its inscription poignantly relates:

> The transition from the bleak hillside of Knockfierna to the coffinless grave in the churchyard of Ballingarry, is a transition as common and indeed natural that it attracts no attention and excites no sensation.

Describing responses to a lecture on the Famine delivered in Newcastle West (near Knockfierna) in 1996, Nuala O'Faolain noted the tensions raised in the local audience: 'In the audience that night in the library there were many elderly farming people. They listened to the lecturer very closely indeed. They said nothing afterwards. The Famine is not something to toy with.'[51] Seven years later, committee member Noel Carmody echoed O'Faolain's remarks that sentiments surrounding land ownership and Famine legacies remain delicate local subjects.[52] For the foreseeable future, however, with funding sources run dry and its organizing committee now disintegrated, Knockfierna remains a dormant site – its status as Famine memory site unresolved despite a temporary local revival.

Presence: embodying the Famine

> […] the body has come to represent the last bastion of materiality: if history is nothing but a narrative, "a tale like any other too often heard," and if the universe is merely an effect of rhetoric, the body seems to stand for an incontestable reality, a throbbing substance in a wilderness of signs.[53]

51 O'Faolain, 'Black Year.'

52 Carmody further recalled that until the 1950s the taunt 'Souper!' was on occasion thrown at Ballingarry players during GAA matches, recalling the stigma of souperism during the Famine period attached to local residents.

53 Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3–4.

The commemoration and restoration of workhouse and burial sites during the commemorative period revealed new attitudes towards the status of the Famine victim in local Irish communities: the taming of overgrown or derelict Famine landscapes, and the marking out of the spaces they inhabited, represented strategies to de-other the Famine victim and find some form of communion with their vanished presence. Although the trope of Famine 'silence' has been challenged in academic circles, it persists as the account against which many memorial builders measured their own historical moment, and formed a primary driver of the urge to construct new memorial 'presences' now dotted across the Irish Famine landscape. The notion of 'presence', as understood here, carries with it multiple layers of signification at the site of commemoration: presence as residue, presence as monument and presence as recollection/representation of the Famine body within landscapes where human remains are invisible yet inescapably palpable.

Community monuments from the 1990s demonstrate the preoccupation with encountering and managing the Famine's residual presence – ruined cottages, vestiges of potato furrows, empty workhouses, derelict graveyards (all exterior structures concealing the destructive effects of the Famine) – juxtaposed alongside newly constructed forms of monumental presence in the shape of commemorative markers. Put another way, the presence of the Famine monument may be conceived as 'figure' to the 'ground' of site/landscape, a deliberate insertion of a new material form which defines, and is also defined by, its context. In order to construct meaning, such monumental presences have functioned representationally (to the extent they depict an event or text outside of themselves), symbolically (taking the shape of a cross, boulder or other sculptural form) and/or metonymically:

> In short, no Famine sufferer is simply herself; each individual conjures up the presence of the countless others who are also absent. It is the simultaneous presence and absence of these others whose almost uncountable numbers make the Famine both 'Great' and unrepresentable.[54]

The very materiality of a monumental presence – its concreteness, permanence, physicality – grounds the popular appeal of this form of community commemoration: a legacy and witness to the duty of care assumed by the present generation, projected into the present and presumed future. The impulse to memorialize is also an act of resistance to forgetting, granting the mortal and vulnerable body a form that will resist the vagaries

54 Morash, 'Spectres of the Famine,' 77.

of time. Committee members in interview frequently spoke of their aim to evoke or facilitate local emotional responses to the memory and enduring legacy of the Famine, through the erection of a local monument in such charged (if peripheral) spaces, and thereby preclude the 'forgetting' of the Famine bodies in their communities.

Looming over the question of presence in Famine memorialization (in all examples, but particularly within Irish local Famine landscapes) is the omnipresent body of the Famine victim. The Famine's physical, visceral effects on the human body have long troubled those who sought ways to represent the Famine through language and image. As discussed in Chapter 2, nineteenth-century painters proved more interested in emotion or sentiment than the corporeal realities of the Famine, preferring (and indeed constrained to) expositions of psychological over physical suffering. Engravings offered graphic images of the Famine more acceptable to (and encouraged by) the emergent medium of the illustrated newspaper, yet they too pale in comparison with reporters' macabre and brutal descriptions which framed them textually. The critical literature concerning the interrelationship between representation, the body, suffering and hunger is of course immense; within the Famine context recent studies of Famine bodies in literature, folklore and other forms of textual/visual representation have similarly centred on the body and somatic experience as a discursive site, from varying perspectives of spectatorship, subjectivity, abjection and violence, 'haunting' and melancholy, memory and modernity.[55]

Such a complex subject can only be touched upon lightly here; however, few (if any) studies have addressed the pragmatic and personal rapprochements of the Famine's presence as they have occurred recently within Irish commemorative communities, and it is their concerns, and how these groups have addressed such conflicts, to which this chapter gives voice. On balance, recent figurative monuments are rarer within Ireland than without, particularly in rural areas, but this outcome owes as much to constraints of cost and ambition as it does to the perceived suitability (or desirability) of figurative forms. In reviewing two groups' efforts to create new Famine commemorations (one figurative, and the other symbolic), each may be seen to grapple with a set of common concerns: how to create a monumental presence, in the present, which is literally and figuratively defined by absence; how the experience of hunger, starvation and death (fundamentally experiences of the body that are inscribed upon it) can be visually communicated to audiences both local and external; and how a

55 See amongst others: Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*; Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*; McLean, *The Event and its Terrors*; David Lloyd, 'The Indigent Sublime: Specters of Irish Hunger.' *Representations* Autumn, no. 92 (2005): 152–85.

relationship can be reconstituted (or re-membered) between the seeing body of the viewer and the body of its attention (the nameless and invisible Famine dead). Each of the projects described has attempted a resolution of this 'central dilemma' (as described by Margaret Kelleher) of 'how to individuate a large-scale and overwhelming event, to render the individual experience while retaining a focus on its collective nature'[56] – whilst also remaining grounded within the particulars of local experience and history.

Clones, Co. Monaghan

One of the few figurative monuments to be found in a mass Famine graveyard is located at the former workhouse cemetery in Clones, Co. Monaghan (Fig. 4.3). Around 1995 a group was formed to preserve the local Bully's Acre and create a monument, led by chairman Peter McClave, owner of the Tower Bar in Clones, fuelled by awareness of the 150th anniversary and concerns that the graveyard would be threatened as local development intensified: 'If people didn't take action there would be houses built on it in a very short time.' [57] Their efforts coincided with the Clogher Historical Society's research into the Famine in the area, which culminated in the production of a historical volume by Brian McDonald in 2000.[58] From the outset the multi-denominational committee took pains to acknowledge the cemetery as the resting place of both Catholic and Protestant Famine victims, with half of the project funding coming from an EEC Peace and Reconciliation grant, managed on behalf of the committee by Monaghan County Council. Action from Ireland was also involved in the project, coordinating a cross-border Famine walk in October 1997 (beginning at the Crom Estate in Co. Fermanagh and ending in Clones graveyard) as a boost to fundraising and awareness efforts.[59] The remainder of project's funding came through donated proceeds from the sale of McDonald's book and other private fundraising (totalling approximately £10,000), and a £1,000 grant from the National Famine Commemoration Committee; no county council or local authority money was received. McClave described his dismay at the reticence of local and national funding bodies to sponsor the memorial project (comments that would be echoed by Famine committee members in many other communities):

> I'll tell you one thing: it was a struggle. When I see the amount of money that was wasted, just people sitting supposed to be doing

56 Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*, 225.

57 Information on the Clones project derives from Interview with McClave (2007). The current owners of the field, the McCaugheys, donated it to the commemorative effort.

58 Brian McDonald, 'A Time of Desolation: Clones Poor Law Union 1845-50.' *Clogher Record* XVII, no. 1 (2000): 1–400.

59 'Cross/Border Famine Walk.' *The Anglo-Celt*, 2 October 1997.

Figure 4.3 *Famine Memorial*, Carolyn Mulholland (bronze figure), Yoram Drori (plaques), Clones, Co. Monaghan (2001)
Clones Famine Graveyard Committee

> research, this that or the other, sitting in offices […] they didn't want to see anything in bricks and mortar or anything else, because it could be criticized.

In total, the renovation and monument project cost in the region of £30,000, with the monument and graveyard renovation totalling approximately £12-15,000 and the remainder earmarked for re-establishing road access to the site (at the time a disused laneway). The monument was unveiled on 8 September 2001 by playwright and author Eugene McCabe.[60]

According to McClave, the committee originally considered installing a Celtic cross memorial, but decided such a monument would prove too expensive. Instead letters were written to several artists about designing a memorial for the cemetery; the sculptor Carolyn Mulholland[61] responded and visited the site in Clones:

> When I saw the field I was moved by the little bumps and hollows – it's a totally plain field. The wind had blown the autumn leaves around and around these bumps so they were emphasised, and it was very touching […] so I said I would [create the monument].[62]

Mulholland agreed to a reduced fee of €4,000 (approx. £3,150) to create the monument and her design was enthusiastically accepted by the committee, who felt the piece captured the starkness of the place in its 'sheer raw simplicity' and directness. Mulholland's sculpture depicts a life-sized, prostrate and emaciated figure covered by a thin blanket or shroud on a raised bier. The body is genderless and nude beneath its shroud, its skeletal frame hidden and yet revealed by the light fabric draping the figure. Between its legs a newspaper extract describing conditions in Clones is roughly scratched into the surface of the bronze:

> It would be impossible to exaggerate, the awful destitution that exists in the town of Clones / and neighbourhood. No day passes but

60 'Clones Famine Memorial Unveiled.' *The Anglo-Celt*, 20 September 2001. McCabe grew up and currently resides in Clones; local pride in his success is evidenced by the inscription of his name on the plaque marking the unveiling.

61 Originally from Lurgan, Co. Armagh, Mulholland is a prolific sculptor working primarily in bronze, elected a member of Aosdána in 1990. Her public commissions include a portrait bust of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1996) on display at the Chester Beatty Library, a portrait of President Mary McAleese (2003) in the Office of Public Works, and *Man with Kite* (2003) at the Customs House in Dublin, and the Northern Ireland War Memorial to civilian victims of the 'Belfast blitz' (2007).

62 Interview with Carolyn Mulholland (Artist), 28 July 2007.

> some victims of this frightful calamity are / committed to the grave. The workhouse contains upwards of a hundred over the / regulated number and most of them were all but starved before they obtained / admission. Their exhausted frames were then unable to bear the food doled out / to them and hence they are, at this moment, dying in dozens. / From the Fermanagh Reporter – Dec. 1846 / and the Northern Whig – 22 Dec. 1846

The hollows of the body emphasised by the blanket's contours echo the softly undulating burial landscape that had so affected Mulholland:

> It was the sight of the field – it was the little bumps, and what was under them. I read the *Great Irish Hunger* during that time […] and really it was that the starkness of a dead body is very hard to avoid. It was just the pathos of the thing.[63]

Unlike most other figurative Famine works, Mulholland portrays the body at life-scale, meaning that as sculpture the figure appears diminutive (in any event probably a more historically accurate representation). Scale and position encourage a wake-like response to the sculpture as if it were indeed a Famine body, evidenced in the newspaper photograph recording the response to the work's unveiling.[64] The image of the anonymous, sexless figure is discomfiting both on the grounds of subject and the viewer's complicity in observation; like Marina Warner's notion of the 'slipped chiton', the shroud is a somatic device that both shields and exposes the body, shifting between inaccessibility and vulnerability. The merging of flesh, bone and fabric provokes and unsettles the viewer; the protective gesture of the figure (its right arm crossed over the torso) is self-conscious but ultimately ineffectual, and the ravaged body at odds with the face's peaceful expression. The direct, hand-written inscription on the bronze surface both situates the work within localized narratives of suffering, and recalls that the Famine is an event largely understood through textual fragments, which in turn give shape to memory. The Famine body is inevitably a site of symbolic reconstruction, forever constituted through what partial impressions and knowledges are in our possession – the single figure here representing the many 'dying in their dozens' – but the isolation of the work and avoidance of any direct interpretation (no explanatory plaques or other historical narrations intrude) allows space for a wide range of responses.

Unfortunately, the potential impact of Mulholland's sculpture is

63 Interview with Mulholland (2007).
64 'Clones Famine Memorial Unveiled.'

diminished somewhat by its installation and the rest of the memorial complex, designed and built without her input:

> I would underline that my work is only the bronze. The decoration that's all around has absolutely 100% nothing to do with me. What I wanted was that the bronze would just lie out on what would look like a bier, just raised up off the ground. The starkness of the whole thing would have had much more impact.[65]

Mulholland refers here to the surrounding wall and support for the monument, and the bronze plaques and cross added by local artist Yoram Drori. The four bronze plaques contain images of the four evangelists loosely based on designs from the Book of Kells, and the inset cross on the ground below the figure also features 'Celtic' interlace pattern. The addition of these pieces contributes little to the framing of the site, and as Mulholland asserts, detracts from the simplicity and minimalism of the monument as intended. Recalling her work with the committee, however, Mulholland remarked on their fierce custodianship of the site: 'There was a real sense of possession about that field […] it's not quite primitive, but it goes much further back. That's nothing to do with public awareness […] That's what I felt anyway, with them.'[66]

The merits of Mulholland's restrained approach to the figurative challenge of representing the Famine body can be seen in brief contrast to another figurative commemorative sculpture, centrally positioned in Roscommon Town (Fig. 4.4). Unveiled as part of the Famine Memorial Garden in August 1999 by the Co. Roscommon Famine Commemoration Committee, the memorial is situated on the site of the former Roscommon workhouse. Stones from a ruined nineteenth-century schoolhouse were recycled to form the gable wall at one end of the memorial, and the original workhouse bell was reinstalled. The pedagogical resonance of the structure is carried through via the insertion of a map into its central niche, detailing the locations of parishes in Co. Roscommon and the rates of population lost, and numerous informational texts placed on plaques scattered around the memorial site.

The central bronze statue by Elizabeth McLaughlin presents a direct sculptural copy of the *Illustrated London News* engraving 'Bridget O'Donnel and Children', with all familiar references intact: the central mother figure flanked by two children, ragged costumes, bare limbs. Yet its differences are telling: in place of the feral gaze of Bridget O'Donnel, the figure's posture and expression convey despair tinged with noble resistance; the

65 Interview with Mulholland (2007).
66 Interview with Mulholland (2007).

Figure 4.4 *County Famine Memorial Garden*, Elizabeth McLaughlin (artist)/ O'Carroll Associates (architect), Roscommon, Co. Roscommon (1999) Roscommon Famine Committee

skeletal human frame of the mother is explicitly foregrounded, her ribcage dramatically extended. The group is elevated on a plinth inscribed '*An Gorta Mór*', the scene framed by the surviving workhouse buildings (now part of Sacred Heart Hospital). While the modelling of the figures is relatively accomplished, there is little depth to the work beyond the immediate impact and shock of the mother's exposure, calling to mind Margaret Kelleher's critique of the use of the female body in literature as a vehicle for Famine spectacle.[67]

In 2011 Clones was selected as the location for the Irish government's third annual National Famine Commemoration Day ceremony, overseen by President Mary McAleese. That their Famine graveyard remains resistant to heavy-handed forms of commemoration and accompanying protocol is suggested by the decision to locate the day's activities (including an Army Guard of Honour, tree planting, unveiling of a new commemorative plaque and wreath-laying) instead at Clones' Market House in the town's centre. An evening community pilgrimage to the burial ground and monument held on 8 September offered a subdued counterpoint to the militaristic 'official' ceremony held two days later – signalling both the ascension of Famine memory to wider local consciousness (and the national stage), and an ongoing custody of the Famine past now activated by this initial intervention into a forgotten space.

Sligo, Co. Sligo

As in so many other communities, the impending Famine anniversary sparked the formation of the Co. Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee in the 1990s, chaired by Joe McGowan:

> We were just a bunch of amateurs really, with an earnest wish to remember the events of 1847 and the surrounding years, with no expertise at all in selecting public memorials [...] If the county itself had taken some initiative we'd probably never have bothered, but we felt that time was slipping by and that the time to get involved and do it was that particular year, and not after that.[68]

A recent building excavation at St John's Hospital in Ballytivnan, just outside Sligo had unearthed human remains, bringing to light the existence of the workhouse mass graveyard that was up to that point unknown:

67 Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine*.

68 Information and quotes which follow on the Sligo project were provided in Interview with Joe McGowan (Chairman, Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee), 24 July 2007.

Figure 4.5 *Faoin Sceach*, Fred Conlon, Sligo, Co. Sligo (1997)
Co. Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee. Photograph by Alan Davis

> I was concerned, and so also was my friend, Seamus Moore, that the hospital, when they needed to do an extension, would build on top of the famine graveyard. We went to look at it and it was completely overgrown, you'd never know that it was a graveyard, it was completely overgrown with weeds and brambles, and there was no trace that it meant anything or represented anything.

McGowan and the committee launched their commemorative campaign in late 1996 with a candlelight vigil leading from St Joseph's church through to the Famine graveyard:

> That was the first recognition that the famine graveyard had received. I remember saying a few words at the time – I can't accurately recall the numbers buried there, but it would be about 3,000 or something like that – but I remember thinking and saying that not any more than if it was 3,000 dogs that were buried there, did we know the name of any single individual who was buried in the graveyard. After all they

Figure 4.6
Cemetery Gates,
Niall Bruton, Sligo,
Co. Sligo (1997)
Co. Sligo Famine
Commemoration
Committee

> were human beings […] that little vigil was a recognition that they were human beings, with families – fathers, mothers, sons, daughters – who led a horrible existence and died a horrible death.

In the wake of the vigil's success the committee set about forming plans to erect Sligo's first memorial to the Famine:

> We sat around and talked about getting a boulder, and squaring off a corner of it, and marking that this was a famine graveyard. We meant to do nothing more than that, but as we continued to have meetings and met with various sculptors, it was put out to open bid to the Sculptors' Society; we were told that was the proper way to do it. Through discussions with the sculptors we came to the realization and we were told that we were not just representing ourselves or the famine dead: we were also representing the people of Sligo, and it would be

Figure 4.7
Famine Family, Niall Bruton, Sligo, Co Sligo (1997)
Co Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee
Photograph by Alan Davis

> a shame to do something less than that cause deserved, or that the people of county Sligo deserved.

According to McGowan, the brief distributed for the project was open, consisting mainly of historical information about Sligo's Famine history without much direction otherwise. With assistance from the Sculptors' Society of Ireland the committee received submissions and held discussions with four or five of the shortlisted artists. On the basis of these conversations, the submissions and maquettes, the committee selected the artists Fred Conlon (from Co. Sligo) and Niall Bruton (from Co. Donegal) to create a series of three memorials: a '*Faoin Sceach*' or lone tree sculpture in the centre of the mass graveyard (by Conlon, Fig. 4.5), a set of iron gates at the entrance to the cemetery (by Bruton, Fig. 4.6), and a figural emigrant group located on Sligo's quayside (also by Bruton) (Fig. 4.7).[69] Although the artists

69 Originally from Dublin, Niall Bruton currently lives in Donegal where he works

were aware of the joint commissioning, each worked independently to create their final piece.

McGowan explained the committee's rationale for expanding their plans from a single £3-4,000 memorial to a project eventually totalling approximately £80,000:

> Through discussion we felt we should do more, because the people who left, who didn't actually die and weren't buried in the Famine graveyard, they should be memorialized as well, and remembered [...] Thousands of local Sligo people were shipped out, mostly by the Gore-Booths of Lissadell, and Lord Palmerston of north Sligo, where Cassiebawn Castle now stands. They also deserve to be remembered and memorialized, and we were very pleased to do that.

After the sculptures were commissioned the committee sought funds for the project, eventually securing £15,000 from Sligo County Council and Sligo City Corporation, in addition to large grants from the Kennedy Foundation Manchester, the EEC Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, Coillte and individual private donations. In total, approximately £40,000 was spent for the figurative emigrant sculpture (£25,000 for the bronze and £15,000 for the base), £25,000 for the *Faoin Sceach* sculpture, and £15,000 for the iron gates. Sligo City Corporation donated a space in a car park for the emigrant sculpture, planned at the time to be transformed into a peace park (never realized); the North West Health Board also gave the group 'carte blanche' to renovate the graveyard adjacent to St John's Hospital and erect their memorial. However, McGowan maintains that city and county officials, by and large, did not match the committee's interest or enthusiasm in acknowledging the area's Famine history:

> The county of Sligo itself or the corporation had made no moves whatsoever and can take no credit at all for memorialising the famine [...] there were some councillors (Fine Gael) who begrudged giving us the money at all, that it would be better spent on hospitals or something like that. I had several radio debates, and compared one

primarily by commission, focusing on jewellery design and some public sculptures; past works include *Waiting on Shore* (2002) at Rosses Point in Donegal and *Fort of the Fair* (2006) in Lahey, Co. Donegal. Fred Conlon (1943-2005) was a sculptor in diverse media who completed many other public artworks and commemorative commissions, including a commemorative sculpture of Charles Stewart Parnell (1991) in Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow and a 1916-1923 memorial sculpture (*Athmhuintearas/Reconciliation*) in Sligo Town (2000).

> particular South Sligo councillor to Queen Victoria, who it was reputed sent a measly fiver to relieve the distress in Ireland.

The role assumed by the committee as caretakers and guardians of local Famine memory was subsequently enshrined on the dedicatory plaque featured at the memorial site:

> Unfed, unwashed, unmourned,
> Here lie the remains.
> To we, the survivors, the sacred rite of burial,
> Into our hands their trampled bones, perpetual vigil.

The memorials were unveiled on 27 July 1997, and have since been integrated into tourist walking trails and guided tours of the city (especially Bruton's more centrally located work). Conlon explained his *Faoin Sceach* (literally translated as 'under the bush') as a form replete with pagan and spiritual significance:

> I had given long and serious thought to the famine and its effect on the people. I chose the lone bush as a suitable memorial for the famine dead. This bush was regarded as a sacred object in rural Ireland. No farmer would cut it down lest it would upset the spirits. During famine times many starving people lay down under it to die or were buried there. The tree was a sacred marker or protector for the un-named dead.[70]

Conlon's work likely refers to the *sceach gheal* or hawthorn tree, a symbol in many European folk cultures popularly supposed to be the source of Christ's crown of thorns. The hawthorn tree's well-known connection with the Famine also owes much to Marita Conlon-McKenna's bestselling Famine-era children's book *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (1990). More recently, the hawthorn tree has featured as a central subject in artist Abigail O'Brien's photographic series *The Rag Tree* (2003), a meditation on the perseverance of folk belief in modern Ireland, and Elizabeth Caffrey and Sean Campbell's public sculpture *Between the Known and Unknown* (2006) in Rathmore, Co. Donegal which bears more than a passing resemblance to Conlon's earlier work.

The tree as imagined by Conlon is barren and windswept, its traditional role as protector or shelter undercut with a darkness suggested by its tangled branches and thorny projections. Though Conlon's interpretative plaque describes the tree as 'a symbol of dignity', its effect is one of bleakness, not

70 Conlon, quoted on Joe McGowan's personal Sligo website: http://www.sligoheritage.com/Archcoffinships.htm.

benevolence; fragility balanced by resistance to the tempest. The tree as emblem of memory displaces the human form but still draws resonance from this association, the bare skeleton of its branches evoking the Famine-ravaged body. The hawthorn is a powerful image of collective belief and faith, sustained through individual performative rituals which affirm the significance of its presence within local and rural places. According to its plaque the boulders surrounding the base are meant to 'allude to ancient forms of burial', doubling the sense of the monument as drawn from elemental, timeless and universal themes; however their execution is awkward and less successful than the central bronze form. As a witness to the Famine, the tree layers natural mythology with Irish folklore and Christian symbolism, retaining a monumental presence through its scale and material, and inviting a range of associations with sacrifice, place and the body. As a work of public art it manages to remain an accessible image while still providing an inventive solution to the challenge of commemorating the Famine within such fraught territory.

While the tree is conceived as stoic guardian of the space merely alluding to the Famine body, the text on an adjacent panel conjures a more harrowing scene of violence:

> I witnessed the women and little children, crowds of whom were to be seen scattered over the turnip fields, like a flock of famished crows, devouring the raw turnips, mothers half naked, shivering in the snow and sleet, uttering exclamations of despair whilst their children were screaming with hunger [...] The workhouse is full and police are stationed at the doors to keep the numerous applicants out. Captain Wynne, District Inspector, Christmas Eve 1846

This text, derived from a letter composed by Captain Wynne (inspector for the Board of Works in Clare) was likely encountered by the commemorative committee in Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*, where this passage is reproduced in full.[71] However, the extract describes a scene set in Clare, not Sligo, and its incorporation onto the dedication plaque (without its source details) might lead one to believe it narrates a local event, even if similar scenes were recorded across Ireland. The attraction of the passage no doubt lies in the striking similes employed by Wynne and the horrific image he dramatically evokes, yet his deployment of animalistic metaphors to describe the starving paupers (though not uncommon for their time) perhaps rests at odds with the 'dignity' of depiction sought by the *Faoin Sceach*.

Niall Bruton's 'Famine Gates' at the entrance to the site form an

71 See also David Fitzpatrick, 'Famine, Entitlements, and Seduction: Captain Edmond Wynne in Ireland, 1846-1851.' *English Historical Review* June (1995): 596–619.

attractive, if primarily decorative, additional element. For McGowan the vines represent the 'new Ireland' blossoming out of the devastation of the Famine (symbolized by the skull outlines), an analogy aligned with the committee's sense of itself as 'survivors' of the devastation. Bruton's quayside figurative sculpture depicts a family group of emigrants, similar in tenor and style to his work *Waiting on Shore* (2002), another commemorative sculpture connected to loss and the sea, and sharing several similarities of composition and gesture to Jeanne Rynhart's *Annie Moore* (1993) emigrant sculpture in Cobh. Unfortunately, the Sligo emigrant group's clumsy composition, poor modelling and literal subject ensure it is a more forgettable, less redolent work than Conlon's contribution. The sculpture fails to evoke any sense of the brutal legacy of Sligo's notorious estate clearances, in its recourse to a clichéd subject, incongruous position in a car park, and pedestal installation on an odd circular plinth flanked by text panels.

Reflecting on the process of tendering for the memorials, McGowan expressed some reservations about the value of arts consultation offered by bodies like the Sculptors' Society of Ireland:

> My belief was, and is, that it was the ordinary people of the countryside that died, and it was just ordinary people, the descendants of those who didn't die, that were erecting the memorial – and the ordinary people of the country who would be looking at those memorials. So what would we have needed experts for? I haven't found anybody who would defeat that reasoning.

Yet the contrast of Conlon's work against Bruton's suggests there is merit in encouraging original approaches to the dilemma of creating Famine monumental presence, and that public accessibility and creative commemorative solutions need not be exclusionary categories.

Performance: commemorative ritual and process

> […] community remembrance is iterative, predicated on repetition […] the praxis of community remembrancing is a performative one. It does not solidify into objects occupying public space, such as monuments, but it persists by dint of being always performed afresh.[72]

72 Joep Leerssen, 'Monument and Trauma: Varieties of Remembrance.' In *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 204–22.

What is the relationship between memory, commemoration, monuments and performance? Superficially, public commemorative monuments might seem antithetical to notions of performativity, as static, material and permanent insertions into the landscape, usually associated with inscribing a fixed (often one-dimensional) memory of a historical event for the viewer. Their physical form and unity of purpose contrasts with what we know to be true of memory itself, its elusive and transitory nature and chimeric manner of expression. Yet, in many important ways, the construction of monuments is itself a deeply performative act: it is the action of commemorating agents which brings the monument into being in the first place, and their vigilance which sustains it against the forces of time, decay and forgetting. Indeed, the dominant verb form of the act of memory – to 'remember' – signals the performative act of assemblage, the reconfiguring of the fractured whole or reconstitution of the body through its disparate members. The public monument may constitute the product of performance, but it is the social praxis of iterative remembering that sustains its ongoing significance.

In another crucial sense, monumental commemoration also evokes the notion of 'agency' so central to the sociology of performance. The protracted and socially performative processes of development – the discussion, planning, tendering, commissioning and execution of the work – all constitute integral aspects of the finished memorial, just as the continued incorporation of the monument into commemorative ritual will determine its future community significance. By examining the performative processes of creation, adoption of visual strategies, and the pragmatics of commemoration, we may observe how (and why) collective values, memories and meanings are expressed in the act of remembrance and memorialization. By way of example, two Famine projects in Doolough, Co. Mayo and Skibbereen, Co. Cork illustrate how performances of monumental commemoration have (in these instances) been circumscribed by the political ideologies of humanitarianism and heritage, and the particular ritualistic and commemorative forms which emerged to meet these objectives.

Doolough, Co. Mayo

As discussed in Chapter 3, the aid organizations Action from Ireland and Concern were among the first to align the memory of the Famine with an agenda of 'Third World' relief and social activism in the early 1980s, themes that would be embraced at large as the 150th anniversary gained prominence in the mid-1990s. Following the 1984 commencement of its 'Great Famine Project', in 1988 AfrI launched its first 'Famine walk', a 10-mile trek between Louisburgh and Doolough, Co. Mayo that would become a staple of its

Figure 4.8 *Famine Memorial*, Doolough, Co. Mayo (1994)
Action from Ireland

Famine fundraising and awareness campaigns over the next twenty years.[73] The walk is a recreation of an incident from March 1849, when a large crowd of the starving poor walked overnight from Louisburgh to Delphi Lodge to seek assistance from the local Board of Guardians. Refused aid, the group was forced to return to Louisburgh; weakened and suffering from exposure, many died on the return journey.

These 'Famine walks' received significant coverage in local and national media, and were also broadcast coverage on several major U.S. networks, and were instrumental in shaping the direction of both national and local efforts to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Famine. Such Famine walks served as cultural and social performances expressing empathy for the 'unseen victim', whilst also relying on the physical 'performance of opposition' of protest and the 'aesthetics of movement'[74] to attract public and media attention. These strategies ultimately proved successful, as Fianna Fáil minister Tom

73 Action from Ireland, *Famine is a Lie* (Dublin: Action from Ireland, 1995).

74 Ron Eyerman, 'Performing Opposition, or, How Social Movements Move.' In *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 193–217.

Kitt officially announced the establishment of the government's National Famine Commemoration Committee during AfrI's seventh annual Famine walk in May 1994. According to AfrI, over twenty of these walks had taken place by 1995[75] and expanded to other counties as well, although the Doolough walk (still held annually) remains the most publicized and well-attended. Key figures invited to lead the walks helped raise their profile and encourage publicity; Archbishop Desmond Tutu's participation in 1991 twice made front page news in the *Irish Independent*.[76] Other past participants in AfrI's Famine walks included Chief Hollis Roberts and Gary White Deer of the Choctaw nation, who first joined the Doolough walk in 1990. In 1831 the Choctaws had endured their own forced displacement and tragic pilgrimage, the 'Trail of Tears' from Oklahoma to Mississippi that decimated the tribe; despite their impoverishment, the Choctaws were moved by reports of the suffering Irish in 1847 and made a remarkable $170 contribution to Irish Famine relief. Through AfrI's efforts and Mary Robinson's enthusiastic support, the Choctaw-Irish connection has become one of the best-known anecdotes of private philanthropy and generosity during the Famine.[77] The close association of the Choctaw with AfrI and the Doolough walk has sometimes led to a direct link erroneously drawn between their 1847 donation and the 1849 Doolough incident, as the story of the donation, Choctaw 'Trail of Tears' and the Irish Famine tragedy become conflated.

Nevertheless, the importance of the walk to AfrI's Famine awareness efforts culminated, in 1994, with the erection of a permanent monument in the Doolough Valley (Fig. 4.8). As discussed in Chapter 5, the high cross has proved one of the most popular forms adopted for local Famine commemorations in both Ireland and the diaspora, building on its long history as a public commemorative symbol used for many diverse memorial purposes. In place of the more typical Insular-form high cross monument, however, the Doolough memorial opts for the enigmatic early Christian cross form, allying the contemporary memorial with a sense of permanence and unbroken lineage with the Irish past, and granting the work an appearance of advanced antiquity (augmented by its remote, rural location) despite its recent fashioning.

Priorities had clearly shifted for AfrI since 1991, when chairman Don Mullan had declared in the *Irish Independent*, 'We don't want our Government erecting monuments of stone or of metal. The monument we want them to erect during this decade is the .7 percent of GNP which the

75 Action from Ireland, *Famine is a Lie*, 3.

76 'Bishop Tutu's Fiery Failte.' *Irish Independent*, 6 April 1991; Tom Shiel, 'Famine Centre Opened.' *Irish Independent*, 8 April 1991.

77 Robinson publicly reiterated the story in many speeches during the 1990s; in 1995 she visited the Choctaws and was made an 'honorary chief'. See also Kinealy, 'Potatoes, Providence, and Philanthropy,' 161–5.

United Nations has asked us to give in official development assistance.'[78] The urge to leave a permanent mark on the landscape memorializing the Doolough tragedy, as well as creating a focal point for pilgrimage and AfrI's annual campaign, clearly proved too compelling to resist, and AfrI has since reaped the publicity benefits of this decision: since its construction the cross has become an important stop along the annual pilgrimage route and is a frequent destination for organized tours of the area. The politics of AfrI's movement are made plain in its inscription:

Front:

To commemorate / the hungry poor / who walked here in 1849 / and walk the third world today / Freedom for South Africa 1994 / 'How can men feel themselves / honoured by the humiliation / of their fellow beings' / Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa

Left side:

Unveiled by / Karen Gearon / Dunnes Stores Strikers / 7th May 1994 / Erected by AfrI

Right side:

In 1991 we walked AfrI's / great famine walk at Doolough / and soon afterwards we / walked the road to freedom / in South Africa. / Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In this one monument four historical experiences are collapsed: the Famine, the struggle for Indian independence, the 'road to freedom' in South Africa, and a Dublin labour dispute which also stemmed from the anti-apartheid movement.[79] The date of unveiling further allied the Famine with the 10-year anniversary of the Dunnes Stores strikes in 1984 and the

78 Shiel, 'Famine Centre Opened.'

79 In the Dunnes Stores strikes of 1984 a group of ten (mostly female) workers refused to handle South African goods in support of the anti-apartheid statement passed by their union, the IDATU (Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union). The workers faced harassment and dismissal, locking horns with Dunnes Stores' management. The strike lasted almost three years, and ended with the government's general ban on the importation of South African goods in January 1987.

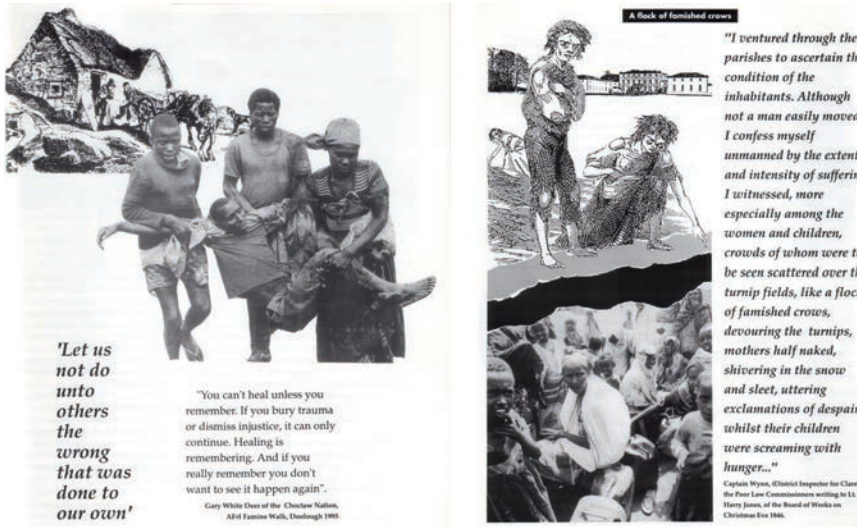

'Let us not do unto others the wrong that was done to our own'
"You can't heal unless you remember. If you bury trauma or dismiss injustice, it can only continue. Healing is remembering. And if you really remember you don't want to see it happen again".
Gary White Deer of the Choctaw Nation, AfrI Famine Walk, Doolough 1995
A flock of famished crows
"I ventured through the parishes to ascertain the condition of the inhabitants. Although not a man easily moved, I confess myself unmanned by the extent and intensity of suffering I witnessed, more especially among the women and children, crowds of whom were to be seen scattered over the turnip fields, like a flock of famished crows, devouring the turnips, mothers half naked, shivering in the snow and sleet, uttering exclamations of despair whilst their children were screaming with hunger..."
Captain Wynn, (District Inspector for Clare) of the Poor Law Commissioners writing to Lt. Col Harry Jones, of the Board of Works on Christmas Eve 1846.

Figure 4.9 Illustration from *Famine Is a Lie*. Dublin: Action from Ireland, 1995
Image courtesy of AfrI

ending of apartheid following Nelson Mandela's presidential election in 1994. The Doolough monument thus provides an example of how Famine commemorations have functioned as composites of the local, national and global: here layering local memory of a specific nineteenth-century incident against AfrI's national agenda for overseas development aid, while referring to analogous contemporary political conflicts, and suggesting a modern Irish self-identity which is both multicultural and globally significant.

The ideological flexibility of the Famine walk and monument has continued into the present as a diverse array of causes continue to be grouped under the Famine banner. In 1994 the walk was led by Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi; in 1995 by Guatemalan Mayan activist Juana Vasquez; in 1998 by war correspondent John Pilger; and in 1999 by Phan Thi (famously the subject of the 1972 Pulitzer-prize winning photograph taken in the aftermath of a U.S.-led air attack on Vietnam).[80] In its most recent incarnation in 2012 the walk was aligned with crop biodiversity, corporate control of domestic agriculture and debates over the production of genetically modified foods, under the theme 'Corporations, Crops and Control: Seeds of Life or Seeds of Strife?'

The banners, speeches, erection of monuments and symbolic leadership of the walks by renowned personages are all familiar components of Irish

80 Margaret E. Ward, 'Child Symbol of War Joins AfrI Walk for Children of Conflict Horror.' *The Irish Times*, 15 May 1999.

HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF HUNDREDS
OF POOR PEOPLE WHO DIED DURING
Irelands so-called Great Famine
In 1879 Michael Davitt VISITED
THIS GRAVE BEFORE FOUNDING THE
National Land League
THEIR MEMORY CHALLENGES US TO
CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE FOR A
MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE WORLD
To Ireland... I LEAVE THE UNDYING
PRAYER FOR ABSOLUTE FREEDOM AND
INDEPENDENCE WHICH IT WAS MY LIFE'S
AMBITION TO TRY AND OBTAIN FOR HER
Michael Davitt
THE EARTH HAS ENOUGH
FOR EVERYONE'S NEED
BUT NOT ENOUGH
FOR EVERYONE'S GREED
Mahatma Gandhi
UNVEILED BY Arun Gandhi (GRANDSON OF Mahtma Gandhi AND Sunanda Gandhi ON SUNDAY 8TH MAY 1994

Figure 4.10 *Famine Memorial*, Swinford, Co. Mayo (1994)
Action from Ireland

commemorative performance, regardless of the event being remembered. Such ritualized walks owe a debt as well to Irish traditions of religious pilgrimage to sacred sites, such as the annual ascent of Croagh Patrick located just a few kilometres from the Doolough Valley. As a deliberate and self-aware act of memory, pilgrimage is a form of performance that establishes a relationship between the individual and a site, an act which when collectively undertaken will define a site's communal significance, a point AfrI has absorbed thoroughly. Yet AfrI's attempts to mould Famine memory to contemporary activism, no matter how laudable the cause, gloss over the fact that connections between the two are neither neutral nor unproblematic. Visual juxtapositions of nineteenth-century engravings and contemporary photographs (replicating Famine-era poses and scenes in selected photos of African and Latin American suffering) in AfrI's publication *Famine is a Lie* (1995) attempt to establish questionable historical and ethical equivalences. The manipulation of such images to serve contemporary agendas is exemplified by the addition of a fictitious background (that of the big house in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon) into a reproduction of 'Searching for Potatoes' (*ILN*, 1849) published in *Famine is a Lie* (Fig. 4.9), and a newspaper advertisement for AfrI's 1991 Doolough Famine walk that inserts Bridget O'Donnel and her children alongside Africans in the queue.[81]

81 Action from Ireland, '"A Road to Remember" – Advertisement for the Annual Great

More seriously, in 1994 Cormac Ó Gráda challenged the veracity of the Doolough story as popularly recounted and instrumentalized by aid groups, claiming that 'The organisers' initial claim some years ago that "several hundred" perished in one night has no more foundations than the old tale about Queen Victoria's miserly relief donation of £5 [...] By all means, use the Famine analogy to raise charity, but those concerned must get their facts right first.'[82] Certainly Ó Gráda's concern at historical distortion through the perpetuation of exaggerated (though compelling) stories seemed validated by public tendencies to dramatize the Doolough incident: photographs of the Louisburgh Drama Group in period costume, wailing and staggering along the Doolough walk, appeared on the front page of the *Irish Independent* on 8 April 1991, with the accompanying article dramatically inflating the 1849 mortality figure to 5,000 people.[83] Any Google search on the Doolough tragedy will retrieve similarly wild ranges of historical statistics and anecdote, the internet encouraging its own peculiar forms of historical confabulation. The line between leveraging and exploitation of the past to suit present needs is a thin one, and such spectacular and overtly theatrical re-enactments are particularly susceptible to distortion in the service of emotive affect, and subject to the same criticism frequently levelled at heritage reconstructions which offer viewers the opportunity to indulge in tragic fantasy under the guise of historical encounter.

The enfolding of Irish Famine memory within global humanitarian narratives was again enacted at the site of a second Famine monument dedicated by AfrI in Swinford, Co. Mayo the day following the Doolough unveiling (Fig. 4.10). This monument, located behind the former Swinford workhouse (now a convalescent hospital), was constructed on the former mass gravesite, itself marked locally by a much older slab monument of indeterminate age and origin. It is perhaps the most explicitly political monument to be found at a Famine mass grave in Ireland,[84] featuring etched portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and Michael Davitt separated by a St Bridget's Cross,[85] as well as quotes from each. Through image and inscription the

"Famine" Walk from Doolough to Louisburgh on 6th of April.' *The Southern Star*, 23 March 1991.

82 Ó Gráda, 'Satisfying a Great Hunger.'

83 Shiel, 'Famine Centre Opened.'

84 That designation may however be rivalled by AfrI's third Famine graveyard monument located in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, also dating from 1994. The monument is engraved with a Christ-like figure wearing peasant clothing and crucified on a pitchfork and spade; its inscription cites 'Ireland 1845 / Bangladesh 1974 / East Timor 1975 / Brazil 1979 / Ethiopia 1984 / Somalia 1992 / Angola 1994'.

85 The cross references AfrI's St Brigid's Peace Cross Campaign, a famine relief project launched in 1983 which raised funding through the sale of crosses handmade by young people.

monument acknowledges Michael Davitt's visit to the Swinford mass grave before his creation of the Land League in 1879 (his family having suffered at the hands of workhouse officials).[86] The juxtaposition of Davitt and Gandhi makes for an unusual pairing in the Famine context, though each is instantly recognizable as an iconic crusader for social justice, and the Land League is a widely cited inspiration for Gandhi's land reform activities. Tucked away behind the hospital and largely unseen by the public, however, the monument lacks any incorporation into a larger framework of local Famine memory (despite its association with Davitt), and its form reads as an uninspired variant on the bland modern graveyard marker.

The connection of Davitt's experiences during the Famine to his formation of one of Ireland's most significant political movements is arguably a subject of far more consequence than Doolough's compelling yet historically fuzzy Famine story. Nevertheless, Doolough's dramatic setting, position along a well-travelled roadway, and absorption into ritualized Famine walks have combined to ensure a position of Famine commemorative significance far surpassing that of Swinford. The contrast reinforces the point that historical veracity need not be the primary factor in perpetuating memory nor in the prompting of commemorative performance, and that the dramatic power of memorial performance and its political utility may well serve as a dividing line between history, heritage and the sustenance of collective memories.

Skibbereen, Co. Cork

Few place-names in Ireland are as closely associated with the Famine as Skibbereen in Co. Cork; the town's immortalization in the popular song *Dear Old Skibbereen* (later nineteenth/early twentieth century) has ensured its perpetual connection with the suffering endured from 1846, and as a recurrent subject of outside media attention, Skibbereen's Famine past is uncommonly rich in surviving textual and visual representations.[87] The central point of reference for several accounts is Skibbereen's mass graveyard at Abbeystrewery Cemetery, where an estimated 8-10,000 lie buried in nine mass burial pits. Unusually for most Famine graveyards, the dead were commemorated there as early as 1887 with an elaborate wrought

86 Michael Davitt, *The 'Times'-Parnell Commission/Speech Delivered by Michael Davitt in Defence of the Land League* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tübner, & Co, 1890).

87 Written accounts include Lord Dufferin and G.F. Boyle, *Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen during the Year of the Irish Famine* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847); Elihu Burritt, *A Journal of a Visit of Three Days to Skibbereen, and its Neighbourhood* (London & Birmingham: Charles Gilpin & John Whitehouse, 1847). Skibbereen also forms the subject of two dispatches from the *Illustrated London News* from 1847 ('Mortality in Skibbereen,' 30 January 1847 and 'Sketches in the West of Ireland,' 13-20 February 1847).

Figure 4.11 *Skibbereen Famine Memorial*, Skibbereen, Co. Cork (1996)
Irish Famine Commemoration (Skibbereen) Ltd

OH SON, I LOVED MY NATIVE LAND, WITH ENERGY AND PRIDE
'TIL A BLIGHT CAME OVER ALL MY CROPS, MY SHEEP AND CATTLE DIED
MY RENT AND TAXES WERE TO PAY, I COULD NOT THEM REDEEM,
AND THAT'S THE CRUEL REASON WHY I LEFT OLD SKIBBEREEN.
HAPPIER WERE THE VICTIMS OF THE SWORD
THAN THE VICTIMS OF HUNGER
WHO PINED AWAY, STRICKEN BY
WANT OF THE FRUITS OF THE FIELD.
IRELAND'S WORST SINGLE DISASTER, THE GREAT FAMINE, 1845 - 1850,
RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF OVER A MILLION OF IT'S PEOPLE,
WITH MORE THAN ANOTHER MILLION CONSIGNED TO THE EMIGRANT SHIP.
SKIBBEREEN, EPICENTRE OF THIS HORROR, SUFFERED MORE THAN MOST
OTHER PLACES AND HERE, IN THE FAMINE BURIAL PITS OF THIS CEMETERY,
WERE PLACED THE COFFINLESS REMAINS OF C. 9,000 VICTIMS,
A CHILLING REMINDER OF MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN.
GO NDÉANA DIA TRÓCAIRE ORTHU.

iron monument commissioned by a GAA-affiliated group and created by local blacksmith Eugene McCarthy (responsible for another late nineteenth-century monument located in the cemetery). Unlike most workhouse burial grounds, the cemetery was also in use during the nineteenth century for burials from all classes of society, and is still in use today. Though little evidence has been found to suggest that the Famine received any formal ongoing commemoration in Skibbereen in the post-Famine years, its memory was nonetheless an active one, prompting a heated debate in 1947 (which made front page news) between members of Skibbereen's Urban District Council (UDC) over a proposal to send congratulations to Princess Elizabeth on her impending marriage. In voicing their strident objection several of the speakers invoked the centenary of the Famine that year and the local memory of its victims buried in the Abbeystrewery cemetery.[88] As in many other towns across Ireland, Skibbereen also hosted annual commemorations of the Manchester Martyrs of 1867 well into the twentieth century; such commemorations were famed for their staging of 'mock funerals' of the three executed men, complete with empty coffins and impassioned speeches extolling the heroism of Irish nationalists.[89] In 1946 *The Southern Star* reported on the incorporation of the Abbeystrewery site and its earlier 1887 Famine memorial into the local Manchester Martyrs' commemoration: after speeches in Irish, a decade of the rosary, and a parade to the cemetery, a wreath was ceremonially laid on the 1887 memorial.[90]

By the early 1990s dismay at the state of the cemetery and letters of complaint published in *The Southern Star* prompted the formal convening of Skibbereen's Famine Commemoration Committee in October 1992, several members of which had also been involved with the Manchester Martyrs commemorations since the 1950s.[91] In November 1992 the group sent notices to the local paper indicating their plans to erect a memorial and renovate the mass plots at Abbeystrewery.[92] The following year the committee's efforts gained momentum through the coordination of a Famine walk in Skibbereen

88 'Royal Wedding: Proposal at Skibbereen Urban Council Meeting.' *The Southern Star*, 8 November 1947.

89 Gary Owens, 'Constructing the Martyrs: The Manchester Executions and the Nationalist Imagination.' In *Images, Icons, and the Irish Nationalist Imagination*, ed. Lawrence McBride (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 18–36; Owen McGee, '"God Save Ireland": Manchester-Martyr Demonstrations in Dublin, 1867-1916.' *Éire-Ireland* Fall-Winter (2001).

90 'Manchester Martyrs: Annual Commemoration in Skibbereen.' *The Southern Star*, 30 November 1946.

91 Interview with Denny O'Sullivan (Treasurer, Irish Famine Commemoration (Skibbereen) Ltd.), 11 August 2007.

92 'Skibbereen Group Plans Memorial.' *The Southern Star*, 7 November 1992; 'Famine Pit at the Abbey.' *The Southern Star*, 12 November 1992.

by AfrI on 24 July 1994, which began at The Castle, Castletownshend and ended at Abbeystrewery. Details of the walk announced in local media outlined the committee's intentions and interests in relation to the 150th anniversary, describing Skibbereen as a 'focal point' and 'epicentre' for the anniversary, of 'special appeal to second and third generation Irish in England, Australia, the U.S. and Canada'.[93]

From the outset Skibbereen's commemorations were twinned with efforts to attract outside tourism to the area: 'They intend to explore truthfully this extremely dark and tragic period and at the same time create a visitor attraction which will neither debase the dignity of humanity, nor trivialise human suffering.' [94] The committee's aspirations to establish Skibbereen as a centre for the sesquicentennial commemorations translated into ambitious plans stretching beyond renovation of the graveyard into the creation of a 'Famine heritage trail' and a major interpretative centre, supported by a feasibility study funded by the West Cork Leader Co-op (a major sponsor of the commemorative efforts). At a mass meeting held four months after the AfrI-led Famine walk, committee secretary Pat Cleary outlined the committee's objective to raise £125,000 for 'Phase One' of the project, the cemetery renovation and Heritage Trail, with the insistence that 'the cemetery will not be developed as a tourist attraction. It will instead be a place where visitors can pay tribute to the very many thousands of people who died during the famine.'[95] Despite Cleary's statement, Chairman Noel O'Driscoll subsequently acknowledged tourism as a significant driver of the efforts:

> Skibbereen is widely recognised as having suffered more from the effects of the Famine than any other part of Ireland. Whist unashamedly proud of our heritage, we decided to combine the major tourist and business potential of the project with the honouring of the memory of our sacred dead who are buried in unmarked graves in various graveyards in the district. [96]

Following the committee's expectation that the renovation and trail would be ready by 1995 (in time for the 150th anniversary), plans for Phase Two of the commemorations were also outlined, in the form of a £2 million visitor centre that would 'extend both ends of the tourist season, with widespread financial benefits for all sections involved in the business, plus creating extra

93 'AfrI "Famine Walk" for Skibbereen.' *The Southern Star*, 10 July 1993. As with AfrI's other activist Famine walks, the Skibbereen walk was led by a survivor of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

94 '"Skibbereen Story" – a Major Project.' *The Southern Star*, 6 November 1993.

95 '"Skibbereen Story."'

96 '"Skibbereen Story."'

employment.'[97] True to the committee's intentions, by 1996 the cemetery had been renovated and the walking trail established, marked by a series of medallions at Famine sites across the town, a viewing platform and a map indicating their location and history.[98]

At the cemetery the committee fulfilled its original plan and created a new archway over the entrance, delineated the mass graves from surrounding plots and refurbished them, erected a large directional sign to the cemetery, paved a plaza near the entrance, and placed plaques along the inside wall of the entrance. The dedicatory panel at the cemetery combines lines from *Dear Old Skibbereen* with affirmations of the exceptionalism of Skibbereen's suffering, again naming the town as the 'epicentre of this horror' which 'suffered more than most other places'. The original 1887 wrought iron memorial was moved from its location at the foot of the mass grave nearest the entrance and replaced by a Celtic cross, its base fronted with sponsored commemorative bricks and a plaque exhorting visitors to 'pray for the families whose names are recorded in this commemorative plot.' Another monument (Fig. 4.11) was added in the form of eleven rectangular slabs arranged in a semi-circle, five large slabs with inscriptions fronted by six smaller plain slabs. The range of inscriptions on the five slabs is perhaps indicative of a committee-based approach, lacking cohesion and confusing in its mix of historical and contemporary texts.[99] An additional plaque was added in 2002 to the memory of Dr Donovan, responsible for bringing Skibbereen to worldwide attention. O'Sullivan cited lack of funding as the primary obstacle to raising a more elaborate memorial; unfortunately, despite the cemetery's significance to Skibbereen's Famine memorial activities, its contemporary monuments are less than impressive. The profusion of plaques and monuments makes for a cluttered memorial site with little visual distinction to recommend it, or attention focused on any particular aspect.

The second phase of the development, the establishment of the Skibbereen Heritage Centre, was realized in 2000 at a final cost of approximately £600,000. The project's development was led by a combination of the Office of Public Works, Cork County Council, Skibbereen UDC and the Skibbereen Famine Commemoration Committee. UDC member Michael Dwyer echoed Noel O'Driscoll's 1993 comments on the layering of Famine memory with the economic benefits of tourism to the area: 'It is important

97 '"Skibbereen Story."'

98 Skibbereen Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, 'The Skibbereen Trail: A Historical Walking Tour,' (Skibbereen: Irish Famine Commemoration (Skibbereen) Ltd., 1996).

99 The text combines extracts from Lady Jane Wilde's poem *The Exodus* (1871) and Rev. John O'Rourke's book *The History of the Great Irish Famine* (1902), wherein he quotes Thomas Hood's famed *Song of the Shirt* (1843).

that we remember the past […] but it's also important that we look to the future with optimism and I believe this project will be a tremendous boost to the town.'[100] Such comments on the conflation of tourism opportunities with Famine remembrance across Ireland were certainly not an isolated occurrence: correspondence relating to the erection of the Famine monument in Ennistymon, Co. Clare similarly noted that 'the strategic location of this Memorial was chosen largely because of its accessibility to approximately 500 tour busses each year and to numerous self-drive tourists.'[101]

Like the Heritage Trail, the Centre was created primarily as an engine of cultural tourism, a meeting point of Famine memory and economic regeneration that would serve to push Skibbereen to the forefront as a national centre for Famine commemoration. This intent was echoed in the Famine Commemoration Committee's unsuccessful effort (as with the case in Knockfierna in Limerick) to locate the National Famine Memorial at their site. Yet the transformation of Famine spaces into tourist amenities or attractions inevitably effects some aestheticization and packaging of what is a complex, conflicted past. As John Lennon and Michael Foley have noted in their study of the multiplication of 'dark tourism' sites, the 'educative elements of sites are accompanied by elements of commodification and a commercial ethic which (whether explicit or implicit) accepts that visitation (whether purposive or incidental) is an opportunity to develop a tourism product.'[102] Skibbereen's Famine memory has long been held as a mark of exceptionalism for the area, referring (as its monument does) to the area as the 'epicentre' of the horror. This semiotic positioning – common to the heritage industry, where claims of uniqueness, extremity and authenticity underpin tourism narratives and economies – validates both the investment of resources into local heritage efforts and perceptions of place distinctiveness and local identity. However, from the perspective of some critics, presenting Skibbereen's Famine legacy as a communal inheritance exemplified the blanket application of victimhood status endemic during the anniversary period:

> Ignoring the shame and the guilt leaves the way open in due course for a version of famine history in which the descendants of those who survived all become vicarious victims […] A case in point is

100 Jackie Keogh, 'Plans for Commemorative Centre at Old Gasworks Site Get Approval.' *The Southern Star*, 5 September 1998.

101 James J. Gallagher, *Letter from Office of the National Director of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America to Dr. Stephen Lalor (Secretary, Irish National Famine Commemoration Committee)* 10 October 1995 (copy provided by Noel Crowley, Clare County Librarian).

102 John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 11.

> the crass proposal for a 'Wall of Remembrance' by Irish Famine Commemoration (Skibbereen) Limited, whereby 'we, the descendants of the Famine victims […] remember our kinfolk.'[103]

In any case, the reanimation of Skibbereen's Famine heritage forms but a contemporary link on the chain of ritualized memory practices that have centred on the Abbeystrewery cemetery since the nineteenth century – a site clearly significant as both place and process. What was textually evoked and visually depicted in newspapers and books of the period remained alive through the proximate commemorations of the Manchester Martyrs, and has now been most recently transformed through the praxis of the contemporary heritage industry. Attempts to move Skibbereen's association with the Famine from a local or regional framework to national significance may not have succeeded formally, but its intriguing layering of Famine commemorative performance – from the evolution of burial procession to the Famine grave, to mock funeral of the Manchester commemoration, to AfrI's Famine walk, to the contemporary performance of tourism through the walking Heritage Trail – suggests that Skibbereen retains an intense, living and ambulatory identification with its Famine past that will continue to make it unusual amongst memorial sites in Ireland.

Conclusion

What will be the lifespan of community Famine memorials? Based on site visits undertaken since 2003, indications are mixed. Several community Famine memorials erected in the 1990s are now falling into disrepair after little more than a decade, such as the monuments erected in Douglas, Co. Cork and in the Pulla cemetery in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. Many others, by virtue of their peripheral locations (as in Killeevan, Co. Monaghan or Ballykilcline, Co. Roscommon) are but little known, even within their local communities. Unlike equivalent examples of community Famine memorials in the diaspora, most are not actively incorporated into ongoing rituals of commemoration, and unless they are absorbed into more formalized systems of care, may little outlast the generation who created them. Given the enthusiasm which accompanied these projects, their quick decay is initially surprising; however, the expansive rhetoric of their makers may serve to obscure that they too may be products of memory spasms, enmeshed in the contingency of historical anniversaries, and not expressions of a living memory per se. Such examples suggest that the temporally defined act of

103 Ó Gráda, 'Satisfying a Great Hunger.'

creating the monument may, in some cases, possess a value apart from (and perhaps exceeding) that of the physical monument itself. Once the act of memorialization is completed, the centrepiece of performance may slip into obscurity, becoming yet another of Robert Musil's 'invisible' monuments[104] or simply another inconsequential shape in the landscape, until it is (perhaps) 'rescued' or 'restored' once again sometime in the future.

Despite many points of similarity and connection, local Irish monuments remain intimately tied to their particulars of place, the interests and ambitions of their organizing committees, and funding sources available or accessed. Some transformations have been dramatic, others subtle: some have opted for discreet burial mounds and plaques (as in Castleblayney, Killeevan or Ardess), many others for traditional cross markers (as in Longford and Tralee), and others still with ambitious pieces of public art (as in Sligo, Clones or Roscommon). The construction of such monuments, and the rituals attending them, have attempted a reversal of perceived historical neglect – ostensibly re-performing the act of publicly respectful burial and remembrance the Famine's victims were initially denied – whilst also resituating the Famine into familiar models of commemorative behaviour and practice. However, the long-term significance and durability of these acts of commemoration is yet to be established as these places of memory remain both site and unfolding process: care must be taken not to overstate their significance and transferability of meaning beyond the generation who transformed them.

Moreover, the reconstruction and reinterpretation of local Famine memories via commemoration, whatever its scale and outcome, continues to risk occluding historical difference, both in terms of the wide variance in local experiences and meanings of the Famine, and problems which arise when national (or regional) narratives and instrumentalizations of Famine experience are grafted onto local sites. Several local commemorative events held across Ireland provided direct embodiments of such concerns: during the June Bank Holiday weekend in 1997, Cobh, Co. Cork staged its 'Great Famine Weekend', a local offshoot of the nationally sponsored 'Great Irish Famine Event' held on 1 June 1997 in Millstreet, Co. Cork. Touted as a celebration of 'the spirit of survival of the Irish', the weekend included re-enactments, special concerts and other activities aimed primarily at drawing in international tourists.[105] An editorial in *The Southern Star*, however, blasted the town's re-imagining of itself as a place that suffered

104 Robert Musil, 'Denkmale.' In *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Rowohlt: Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1978), 480–83.

105 'Commemorated Famine over Holiday Weekend.' *The Southern Star*, 7 June 1997. The Cobh event may well have taken its lead from the Millstreet event, which similarly billed itself as 'a celebration of triumph over disaster'.

the effects of Famine, arguing many residents had in fact profited from emigrants swarming into the port town:

> The local bigshots, the clergy and business people indulged in an orgy of almost unbelievable bad taste [...] The restaurants had 'famine menus'. Pubs and shops were decorated to make them look like famine stricken 'cabins' and townspeople donned old style fancy dress [...] But for many other Cobh people, the event was a disgrace and insulted the memory of the dead.[106]

Anniversaries and commemorations have a tendency to collapse categories of experience, and attempts to reclaim the Famine on the basis of a 'shared' heritage (where 'survivor' and 'victim' claims are combined or applied indiscriminately[107]) all too easily domesticate the past for present consumption. Few Famine monuments deal directly with the mixed legacy of the Famine; and although the emotionalized and fictive extremes of diasporic commemorative activities are usually avoided, Irish local commemorations more often aspire to the demarcation and sacralization of Famine spaces than the interrogation of a difficult past in all of its nuance and conflict.

If structures and symbols like the workhouse, cemetery, cross and cottage have persisted as icons and indices of Famine commemorative efforts in Ireland, their recent deconstruction by Irish contemporary artists working in installation, photography and time-based media (at the time of the 1990s commemoration through to today) suggests possibilities of imagining alternative spaces of Famine memory and the legacy of migration in rural Ireland. Some of the most compelling of these artworks include Alanna O'Kelly's photomontage *The Country Blooms – A Garden and a Grave* (1990) and video *No Colouring Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth* (1994); Patricia McKenna's site-specific installation *The Grey House* (1993-4); Kathy Herbert's photographs *Shadows* and *Angels in the Hay* (1996) and installation *Absent* (1996); Dorothy Cross' video *Endarken* (2000) (Figure 4.12);[108] Deirdre O'Mahony's *X-PO* participatory public art project in Cavan (2007-8); and David Creedon's photographic series *Ghosts of the Faithful Departed* (2011).[109]

106 'Archon', 'Cobh not Appropriate?' *The Southern Star*, 16 August 1997.

107 Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine*, 230–31.

108 A meditation on the evasive visibility of Famine experience, Cross' video depicts the flickering image of a ruined Famine-era cottage, slowly and repeatedly obscured by an expanding black dot.

109 Notable group exhibitions of Famine-related contemporary art critically reflecting on Famine memory also included the *Skibbereen Sculpture Symposium* (1995); the Irish Museum of Modern Art's *Representations of the Famine* (1998); and *Éire–Land* (2003) at McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College.

Figure 4.12 Dorothy Cross, *Endarken* (2000), DVD PAL, 1 minute loop. Image courtesy of the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

Though categorically distinct from the forms, practices and ambitions of most commemorative projects (as essentially individual, not collective reflections on Famine and migration history[110]), each challenges the essentializing tendencies of the heritage industry and the often crippling paralysis of traditional Irish monumental aesthetics. In their use of unconventional media, site-specificity or time-based formats, such works question the permanence and hegemony of memory and its representation. Equally, they share a candid interest in the three themes structuring this chapter – site, presence, performance – as important points of engagement with Famine and emigration history, memory and time. Their diverse and unsettling meditations remind us that the past must remain forever ephemeral, despite our attempts to solidify its shapes in an effort to render it knowable, and problematize the role of the individual and collective in shaping its communication across generations. While such artworks will never formally eclipse (or substitute for) the mainstream monumentalization of Famine which rolls inexorably onwards, they may perhaps give pause to those seeking visual expressions of the Famine, and recommend that our attention to Famine memory remain fundamentally rooted in an understanding of ourselves.

110 Deirdre O'Mahony's *X-PO* project is, however, distinguished by its collaborative and participatory nature: based on the revival of a defunct rural post office in Kilnaboy, Co. Clare, the project engaged with local residents over a seven-month period to create a series of exhibitions and events reflecting on migration and rural transformation, preservation of local histories and community place-making. The project space is now currently maintained as a community resource; for project documentation see www.x-po.ie.

5
Community Famine Commemoration in Northern Ireland and the Diaspora

As with the monuments of the previous chapter, most community commemorations in Northern Ireland and the diaspora represent vernacular counterparts to officially sanctioned and nationally scaled monumental projects, screened through local concerns, histories and places. Though the rallying cry 'remember the Famine' unites these memorials, the outcomes of more than three dozen projects in Northern Ireland, Britain, Canada and the United States constructed since 1990 indicate that key questions of what Famine memory actually *is* and *why* it should be remembered remain far from consensual.[1] From the outset there were concerns voiced in the Irish media that diasporic, particularly American, influence over commemorations would perpetuate hackneyed clichés of Irishness both at home and abroad. In retrospect, some of these fears were justified: several poorly conceived 'Famine tourism' initiatives[2] and a healthy dose of commemorative shamrockery certainly joined more thoughtful, considered efforts. However, the reduction of diasporic commemorative responses to an undifferentiated collective (or dismissed as a superficial 'Faminism'[3]) overlooks the tensions present within diasporic Irish communities themselves over issues of ethnic identity and public representation, and the distinct contexts of their actual creation.[4]

1 Whilst the majority of this chapter concerns diasporic community commemoration, a discussion of Northern Irish commemoration is also included, given points of symmetry with sectarian concerns that have characterized projects in Britain.

2 The Doagh Famine Village in Co. Donegal (opened in 1997) for example – a private attraction clearly aimed at the summer tourist market – transforms during winter into 'Santa's Lapland' for locals.

3 Foster, *The Irish Story*, 31.

4 See for example debates concerning the 1996 *Gaelic Gotham* exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York: Frank Naughton, 'The "Gaelic Gotham" Dispute: An Analysis of an Exhibition Controversy in New York City.' *Éire-Ireland* 31, Spring/Summer (1996): 176–88.

In the absence of 'official' or government-led structures of commemorations, Famine anniversary celebrations in Britain, the U.S., Canada and Australia generally fell under the purview of local Irish heritage groups: some in existence since before the Famine (like the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick), others of more recent vintage, and all linked by networks and umbrella committees created across different community groups specifically in response to the anniversary. These groups formed new collectives with an impressive output of activities supported through energetic private fundraising: lecture series, writing of local histories, organized tours to important North American Famine sites and the construction of local memorials. The informal configuration of most groups (and reliance on lengthy funding campaigns) meant that a number of major diasporic Famine commemorations appeared several years after the Irish government's official celebrations had ended: the Philadelphia *Irish Memorial* was unveiled in 2003, and Toronto's Famine memorial unveiled in summer 2007; in many respects, 1997 marked a beginning, not a culmination of commemorative activity.

Nearly all the monuments in the diaspora represented new commissions in cities or towns with few physical traces of Famine history still evident: for the most part, these monuments constituted the sole public visualization of either Famine or Irish memory/identity within a crowded multicultural civic landscape. Unlike most monuments in the Republic (with the exception of those projects in the North), many do not occupy innately resonant or meaningful Famine-related locations, nor have they secured the highly visible public spaces of major monuments addressed in Chapter 6,[5] with the majority sited in local parks, Irish cultural centres, Catholic cemeteries and peripheral urban locations.

Varied in scale and expense, most were modest commissions (with budgets under €100,000) managed by local grassroots community groups. Private donations constituted the majority of funding, usually supplemented by limited amounts of local government support (financial or via donation of site). Their intended audience was nearly always local, defined and delimited by geography, budget, and/or ambition. Several involved the participation of visual artists in their development and execution, but by no means all. Consequently, there is considerable variation in visual design and distinction, though dominant visual themes have nonetheless emerged. A common preparatory activity amongst diasporic committees was the formation of study groups dedicated to reviewing recent Famine historiography and collecting local histories and accounts to inform the memorial process

5 See Chapter 6 for a comparative discussion of major Famine commemorative projects in the diaspora, including monuments in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Sydney.

and the development of inscription/symbology. Most committee leaders were active in following emerging Irish Famine academic research, and in interview expressed strong opinions with respect to preferred historians and narratives of the Famine. Though these monuments are the product of collective efforts, the personal and family histories of the individuals responsible have significantly shaped their commemorative outcomes, even if such impacts are not always patently visible. Roy Foster has described the 'elision of the personal and national' as a 'particularly Irish' means of collapsing history and biography,[6] but in fact this approach is widely observable across commemorative communities worldwide.

Most of the monuments in this chapter have been assembled under the heading 'diaspora', but the application of this term to the millions of people claiming Irish ancestry is relatively recent. Mary Robinson's landmark speech 'Cherishing the Irish Diaspora' in 1995 marked a high point in its rhetorical existence from which it has yet to retreat; no other term has equalled its popular appeal as signifier of a collective cultural identity and perceived global Irish community. In addition to its adoption as semantic shorthand for the public, politicians and academics alike, 'diaspora' has become standard nomenclature within Irish studies along with other ethno-centric disciplines seeking to discover commonalities and points of intersection amongst dispersed ethnic groups and their descendants. As an alternative to both traditional single nation-state and comparative methodologies of historical analysis (towards what Kevin Kenny has termed a 'transnational' approach), its widespread adoption has nonetheless been countered by considerable dispute over its legitimacy and application to the Irish experience.[7] Critics point to its tendency as a framing device to smooth away historical and geographical inconsistencies in favour of a unified picture, paradoxically replicating the 'flattening' effect of methodologies it was intended to replace. Reference to diaspora often further implies homogeneity of ethnic self-definition within communities and by individuals,[8] as if 'being Irish' means the same thing whether one lives in Ballina or Boston, and 'Irishness' exists as an identifiable and quantifiable form of identity. As former Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht Michael D. Higgins quipped, 'To be Irish […] is simply to be called Irish, and to know what that means you generally have to ask the English, or failing them, the Americans.'[9] Deployment of Irishness as 'other' in contrast to an

6 Foster, *The Irish Story*, xi.

7 Kevin Kenny, 'Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study.' *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 June (2003): 134–62.

8 Catherine Nash, *Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories, Genealogy and the Politics of Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 43.

9 Michael D. Higgins and Declan Kiberd, 'Culture and Exile: The Global Irish.' *New*

Anglo American, French Canadian or British Australian identity is often more telling in its relationship to dominant cultural/national identities than as a unifying or stable cross-national ethnic category,[10] its use suggesting a cultural consensus not borne out by belief or behaviour.

Nevertheless, for the agents of commemoration the memory of the Famine is inextricably bound with concepts of diaspora and exile, real or imagined. As Kerby Miller has argued, the fusion of 'emigrant' and 'exile' self-conceptions uniquely characterizes the Irish amongst other nineteenth-century immigrant groups,[11] and the monumental commemoration of the Famine in the 1990s (centred on themes of cultural dislocation and familial estrangement) demonstrates the ongoing adherence of Irish migration narratives to this teleology, however disputable or distorting it may be. Community Famine monuments do indeed evidence what Kenny describes as the 'collapsing [...] of Irish migration history into one overarching concept' as they foreground the Famine as diasporic origin myth, and invariably oversimplify and condense the 'religious, regional, socioeconomic, and temporal diversity' of local and national migration histories.[12] Yet perhaps a more productive vein of analysis lies not in the debunking of cultural myths, but in expanding an understanding of their resonance, popular appeal and the varied means by which monuments articulate collective memories that are the product of local political, social and historical contexts:

> Foregrounding this issue of active identification with Irish ancestry [...] is not to suggest that those identifications are somehow inauthentic, invalid or unsupportable. But it does convert forms of identification that are often deemed to be natural into social and cultural practices to be explored.[13]

Though the term diaspora is etymologically linked to concepts of dispersion and exile, one consequence of Ireland's outward migration has been the genesis of dense new networks of relationship (community-based and global) whose contemporary configurations are complex and mercurial. Famine monuments across three continents bear a striking resemblance to one another, a small number even exchanging the same raw material in a talismanic fashion. They have been fundamentally transnational in their

Hibernia Review Autumn (1997): 74–93.

10 Donald Harman Akenson, 'A Midrash on "Galut", "Exile" and "Diaspora" Rhetoric.' In *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster-American Folk Park, 1997), 5–16.

11 Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 343–4.

12 Kenny, 'Diaspora and Comparison,' 145.

13 Nash, *Of Irish Descent*, 46.

development and construction, with several sculptors executing commissions in multiple geographies, close connections between commemorating groups across the diaspora, and (often consciously) shared iconography and inscriptions. Social and visual networks have extended beyond physical space into cyberspace, with individual Famine commemorative groups' websites linked to one another and cross-referenced extensively. These new arenas into which contemporary community and diasporic memory have drifted – their immediacy and interrelatedness, and the technologies impacting their expression – warrant examination as equally as individual projects themselves.

Andreas Huyssen's influential work on the intersection of memory studies, sculpture and public space – particularly his conceptualization of 'memory sites in an expanded field' – offers one pathway towards deciphering the distinct meanings generated by physical commemorations in a globalized present.[14] Huyssen's hybrid term references both Pierre Nora's concept of '*les lieux de memoire*' (sites or realms of memory) and Rosalind Krauss' prescient 1979 essay on sculpture's 'expanded field', which tracked the rise of contemporary art practices challenging traditional categories of sculpture and anticipated their current dominance.[15] However, Huyssen's expanded memory field is one where memorial projects are no longer constituted in an isolated national or socio-historical moment (as Nora would suggest) nor bound to a progressive model of artistic evolution (as Krauss' study implied), but occupy a range of political and aesthetic positions closely linked to one another within a global 'memory culture':

> However different the mode or medium of commemorating may be in each local or regional case, all such struggles about how to remember a traumatic past of genocide, racial oppression, and dictatorship play themselves out in the much larger and more encompassing memory culture of this turn of the century in which national patrimony and heritage industries thrive, nostalgias of all kinds abound, and mythic pasts are being resurrected or created [...] Memory projects may construct or revise national narratives [...] but these narratives are now invariably located in a space somewhere between the global and the local. This in-between space needs to be studied in its own right.[16]

For Huyssen the archetype of this phenomenon is the impact of Holocaust

14 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 96–7.

15 Nora, *Realms Of Memory*; Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field.' *October*, no. 8 Spring (1979): 30–44.

16 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 95–6.

commemoration on memorial practices worldwide. In his view, the dominant force and visibility of Holocaust memory has accelerated a certain degree of visual hegemony across global commemorative practices, where the Holocaust now serves as a 'floating signifier' or postmodern 'cipher' which 'loses its quality as index of the specific historical event and begins to function as metaphor for other traumatic histories and memories.'[17]

Huyssen's 'expanded field' may be usefully applied against several dimensions of Famine memory and commemorative activity in the twentieth and twenty-first century. In the first instance it anticipates the elisions evident between Famine remembrance and other historical experiences, whether explicitly or implicitly made. As argued in Chapter 3, the Holocaust and associated discourses of post-memory/generational trauma have profoundly shaped expressions of Irish Famine memory. Equally, the layering of various epochs of historical experience (and generations of commemoration) at the site of Famine monuments is a phenomenon common to all diasporic contexts. In Northern Ireland, the legacy of the Troubles and tensions surrounding republican commemoration have dogged community Famine projects (and their relative scarcity); in Britain, contemporary sectarian divisions as well as traditions of First/Second World War commemorations have made their mark; in Canada, the commemorative templates established by Catholic fraternal organizations in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century have circumscribed nearly every recent Famine memorial; and in the U.S., a wide swath of alliances have included U.S. Civil War history, Holocaust memory and 9/11. The juxtaposing of Irish Famine remembrance alongside such a range of experiences demonstrates how the act of commemoration often slips loosely across the field of memory – conceptually in terms of historical analogies drawn by committees, and physically in sharing civic sites already occupied by other public memorials whilst borrowing from their iconography and ritual traditions.

Second, the notion of an expanded global memory field further suggests how (and why) Famine memory *itself* now frequently operates as a 'floating signifier' defining Irishness and emigrant narratives abroad. Huyssen's description of an 'in-between space' newly activated between global/local perspectives mirrors similar shifts in Irish diasporic methodologies: as Timothy Meagher has noted, 'While the nation fades in significance in a new global era, the focus shifts not only up, but down – not only to the broadly global or multinational but to the specific and the local.'[18] In

17 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 13–14, 99.

18 Timothy J. Meagher, 'From the World to the Village and the Beginning to the End and After: Research Opportunities in Irish American History.' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 Summer (2009): 118–35.

applying the metaphor of a memory 'field' to sites of diasporic commemoration, a horizontal form of meaning-making is implied, departing from a traditional radial model which posits the 'home country' as central, and thus allows for the complex web of cultural influence and practice across the diaspora to emerge. In other words, the breadth and diversity of the Irish diaspora compels an analysis addressing intersections of the local and national with the global: the permutations of memory visually manifest in Famine monuments owe their evolution to all three dimensions.

Moreover, the visual vocabulary of Famine remembrance as developed across the diaspora (and explored in this chapter) suggests there is no strict hierarchy of influence, as public memorials have drawn from sources including Irish prehistorical monuments, nineteenth-century Famine images, major late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century national icons of Irishness, war commemoration, Holocaust-inflected designs and pragmatic imitations of other groups' design concepts (led less by historical relevance than by convenient availability of raw materials). Famine memorial designs have distilled from a pool of aesthetic models rather than any single tributary, but nearly twenty years of monument-making reveal it as a shallow, self-replenishing, and consequently rather stagnant reservoir of inspiration. In the case of Famine commemorative aesthetics, at least, the metaphor of an 'expanded field' is perhaps less apt than the image of a closed circle, with a few vectors breaching its boundary.

The three sections of this chapter address community memorials in Northern Ireland, Britain, Canada and the U.S. across a set of common concerns – mapping national and regional narratives of Famine memory against individual projects' processes, community and political contexts, iconography and media – towards the aim of evoking local, transnational and comparative perspectives. Crucially, however, the revival of diasporic Famine memory and the recent proliferation of commemorative visualizations emerge less the products of a positive globalism than indicators of anxieties that beset notions of Irish identity abroad. Efforts to stem the erosion of Irish ethnic identity and amplify its public presence within a continually unfolding and unforgiving present support Huyssen's view that 'we are trying to counteract this fear and danger of forgetting with survival strategies of public and private memorialization. The turn toward memory is subliminally energized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space.'[19] If the field of Famine memory has indeed become a globalized one in recent years – marked by resistance to historical erasure and redefinitions of Irishness through acts of public memory and representation – there is no better place than the diaspora to examine the contours of this new terrain.

19 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 18.

Commemoration in contested spaces: Northern Ireland and Britain

Undoubtedly the most volatile of Famine commemorative geographies is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As noted in Chapter 3, the Famine's 150th anniversary coincided both with ongoing sectarian violence and the evolution of the peace process; as a consequence, the common alliance of Famine memory with Irish republicanism lay bare angry debates on historical blame, apology and the colonial legacy of the Famine, and was cautiously embraced in divided communities by groups cognizant of its incendiary potential.[20] In comparison to the Republic, where numerous memorials can be found in nearly every county, only a handful of new Famine monuments have been erected in Northern Ireland and Britain since the 1990s.[21] Though rhetorically (and correctly) the Famine was referred to as an 'all-Ireland' experience by the Irish National Famine Commemoration Committee and its Chair Avril Doyle, in practice very little funding or support was directed towards activities in the North or Britain. Given that commemoration of any stripe remains a heavily loaded public gesture in many communities (leading to the physical attack or destruction of public monuments[22]), the paucity of Famine memorials is unsurprising.[23] Whilst remnants of Famine experience (Famine roads, workhouses cemeteries) are equally visible in rural Northern Ireland, they have seldom been explicitly identified and refashioned as has been so common in the Republic, and the formalized coming-together of local individuals to establish community monuments has as yet rarely taken place. Commemorative understandings in the North and Britain are consequently more diffuse and difficult to excavate, and the very small number of projects further complicates attempts at generalization.

One significant exception to the absence of Northern Irish monuments is the major cross-border memorial located in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh (Fig. 5.1). On 28 August 1995 a ceremony was held at the Cornagrade graveyard, site of the former workhouse cemetery, to commemorate the first

20 In one example, the Famine memorial committee in Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh (according to chair Breege McCusker) pointedly sought an equal representation of Catholics and Protestants (three members of each denomination) to choose their monument's form and inscription.

21 See Appendix. Neither London nor Belfast have received public Famine monuments (apart from a commemorative stained glass window installed in Belfast's City Hall in 1996.)

22 Jane Leonard, *Memorials to the Casualties of Conflict Northern Ireland, 1969 to 1997* (Northern Ireland Community Relations Council/Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1997).

23 John Nagle, 'From Melancholia to Mourning: the Ambivalent Role of Commemoration to Facilitate Peace-Building in Northern Ireland.' *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (2008): 28–34.

Figure 5.1 *Famine Memorial*, Eamonn O'Doherty, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland (1996) Fermanagh District Council

outbreak of blight reported in the area. Attended by Irish Minister of State and Famine Commemoration Committee Chair Avril Doyle and members of Fermanagh District Council, the Enniskillen event (along with three others that autumn) marked the beginning of the Irish government's official commemorative programme.[24] The selection of Enniskillen for the ceremony drew clear political reference to the violence experienced by the border town during the Troubles (and the IRA cease-fire of 1994 then tenuously held), most particularly the Remembrance Day massacre of 8 November 1987, where eleven people were killed following the planting of an IRA bomb at the town's cenotaph. The following month, Fermanagh District Council advertised for submissions for a permanent memorial at the graveyard through a public competition overseen by the Sculptors' Society of Ireland.[25]

24 Dáil Éireann Debates, *150th Anniversary of the Famine: Statements*.

25 Sculptors' Society of Ireland, 'The Paupers' Graveyard: A Commission to Mark this Historic Famine Site (public tender document),' (1995).

The project was financially supported by Fermanagh District Council, the National Famine Commemoration Committee, the Arts Council Northern Ireland and the Central Community Relations Unit, and unveiled on 28 August 1996.

Today the Cornagrade graveyard lies in the midst of a public housing estate on an elevated site overlooking Lough Erne. As with many Famine graveyards in the Republic, the Cornagrade site was consciously preserved over the years (and transformed into a green field children's play area in the 1970s) despite dense residential development on all sides. The tender document for the commission noted the conditions of social deprivation and long-term unemployment still affecting the surrounding housing estate, though it also acknowledged 'the community spirit of the neighbourhood is strong and is recognised as one of the positive aspects of living in this area.' The tender further stipulated that 'Strictly abstract work is not being sought'; 'Work which incorporates seating for the residents of the adjacent housing estates would be welcomed'; and the final sculpture should be 'conducive to peaceful contemplation'. After a shortlisting process, a design by Irish sculptor Eamonn O'Doherty was awarded the commission:

> Between two stone gables, reminiscent of the deserted cottages still to be seen frequently in the west of Ireland, stands a heavy bronze table with empty dishes, which fill with rain water and blown leaves adding to the feeling of desolation and dislocation.[26]

In interview, O'Doherty recalled his decision to avoid skeletal figures, a 'devalued' image in his opinion, and pursue instead symbolic or suggestive forms that might address 'the attendant misery of dislocation'. While elements from this initial Famine work would eventually reappear in two subsequent Famine sculptures by O'Doherty (the stone gables in his Westchester, NY monument of 2001, the St Bridget's cross and empty bronze bowl in Liverpool, 1998), his avoidance of figuration would be reversed in the Westchester project realized five years later. Unusually for most monuments located in Famine graveyards, there is no direct visual reference to the former use of the site, nor the presence of the Famine dead,

26 A prolific sculptor trained originally as an architect, O'Doherty (1939-2011) completed many public sculptures in Ireland and abroad, and is perhaps best-known for his controversial 1988 *Anna Livia* sculpture commissioned for O'Connell Street in Dublin. Information about his several Famine commissions was provided in: Interview with Eamonn O'Doherty (Artist), 1 September 2006, and via consultation of his personal files. See also the interview with Anne Marie Ridge, 'With Regard to the Issue of Permanency, What about the Persistence of Memory?' *Sculptors' Society of Ireland Newsletter* 4D Special Issue (1997).

though the empty and abbreviated stone cottage suggests a palpable human absence. The monument's plaque achieves this instead textually, declaring the memorial site as the former paupers' graveyard and juxtaposing two quotes: one from an 1847 letter to the local Board of Guardians decrying the 'shameless, indecent and dangerous piling of the dead paupers in the new ground' and another from sixteen-year-old Fermanagh schoolgirl Martina Feely dating from 1996: 'Allow the fertile crop of change to grow / Accept what is past / Embrace what is to come.' Feely's oblique poetic reference to cross-community reconciliation, whilst a noble sentiment, seems a strange choice for a Famine site, and the phrase 'fertile crop of change' somewhat inappropriate in a site whose 'dead paupers' were decimated by a catastrophic crop failure. Her exhortation to 'accept what is past' forms a contemporary conciliatory sentiment that clashes with the desperate tone of the adjacent 1847 relief committee text, as if pre-empting the frequent politicization of Famine memory for nationalist ends.

The difficulty of creating or maintaining a 'neutral' Northern Irish Famine memorial, and the challenges of erecting sculpture in communities suffering from social deprivation and sectarian strife, is evidenced by the ongoing vandalism and neglect of this monument's site. The seats installed around the work have since been ripped out, and on site visits evidence of bonfires, garbage and used drug paraphernalia littered the site, with 'IRA' graffiti spray-painted on one of the gable walls. Most intriguingly, in May 2002 the graveyard received an additional (unofficial) monument situated just yards away from the Famine memorial (Fig. 5.2). This memorial to hunger striker Bobby Sands commemorates the 21st anniversary of his death, and its Irish inscription (albeit containing several spelling and grammatical mistakes) recalls his 1981 election as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. As an article in the *Impartial Reporter* noted, 'the position of the memorial to a hunger-striker in an area commemorating those who died of hunger in the Famine was not lost on observers.'[27] Ironically the laser-cut, poorly executed Sands memorial was surrounded (during one site visit in 2007) with bouquets and tricolour floral arrangements, contrasting sharply with the neglected, decaying 'official' hunger monument. The Sands monument was itself vandalized during the weekend prior to its unveiling,[28] and in 2007 Fermanagh District Council was accused of a possible breach of equality legislation due to the memorial's 'illegal' location on Council property,[29] though the monument remains in place and persists as a site of republican ceremony. Controversies over the erection of unofficial republican monuments

27 'All Sides Fly their Flags.' *The Impartial Reporter*, 30 May 2002.
28 'All Sides Fly their Flags.'
29 'Sands' Memorial Could Breach Equality Laws.' *The Impartial Reporter*, 5 April 2007.

IS NAOFA LÁ SILIÚ
SÁ fhulaingíonn ocras ar son na cora
I nÓil humhinne
AR
ÓGLACH BOBBY SANDS
Teisire Pharmanach-thír eoghain theas
a d'éag 5 bealtaine 1981
in aois 27
I ndiaidh 66 lá ar stáile ocrais
ar son stádas polaitiúil a chomhchimí
agus saoirse na héireann
Imeasc laochra na ngaél go raibh a ainm uasal
"Is í gáirdeáp bpáistí an ófoltas a bheas againn

Figure 5.2
Bobby Sands Memorial, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland (2002)
Photographed in 2007

have not been limited to Fermanagh: a vigorous debate in the Northern Irish Assembly in 2002 on the subject of 'unauthorised terrorist memorials' ended in a narrowly passed motion rejecting 'the offensive trend' of unsanctioned republican memorial construction, and in 2009 Omagh District Council published an extensive 'Equality Impact Assessment' in response to one such nationalist memorial in Dromore erected in 2001, resulting in an amendment to the council's cultural policy on public monuments.[30] As the Cornagrade site has no particular connection to Sands, it is the presence of the Famine memorial that has activated the use of the graveyard for commemorative

30 Northern Irish Assembly – Debates, *Erection of Unauthorised Terrorist Memorials* (11 June 2002); Omagh District Council, *Results of the Equality Impact Assessment on the Disposal of Land for the Purpose of Erecting or Retaining a Memorial or a Monument under Section 75, The Northern Ireland Act, 1998* (Omagh September 2009).

purposes, and connected in some viewers' minds with the legacy of Irish hunger and nationalism, despite its conspicuously ecumenical conception.

If Famine commemoration in the North remains fraught with potential sectarian tension, the same is true to some extent in other areas of Britain, and Famine commemorative committees there have expressed a special sense of responsibility and caution in marking the event in some significant way. Despite the massive impact of Famine emigration to Scotland, Wales and England – Britain, of course, attracted more nineteenth-century emigrants than any other destination – only four Famine memorials were instigated during the 1990s and early 2000s: in Liverpool, England (1998); Islay, Scotland (2000); Carfin, Scotland (2001); and Cardiff, Wales (2002). The Carfin and Liverpool projects form particularly compelling examples of the layering of historical experiences at the site of Famine commemoration, and the co-option of Famine memory for and by disparate purposes and perspectives.

Carfin

Local and national politics often play an integral role in determining the shape of a memorial, but in the case of the monument erected in Carfin, Scotland (Fig. 5.3), they threatened to engulf it altogether. The village of Carfin lies a short distance outside Glasgow in the county of North Lanarkshire, a region that received a steady stream of Irish immigrants throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Large numbers of Irish settled in the parishes of Carfin and Coatbridge (in the diocese of Motherwell) and made up a substantial proportion of the local coalmine workforce through the 1920s. Together with Polish and Lithuanian communities, the Irish have contributed to a Catholic population in North Lanarkshire which at the time of the commemoration hovered around 35%, compared with 16% for the rest of Scotland.[31] Carfin's main attraction is its large Catholic Grotto in the parish of St Xavier – a reproduction of Lourdes built in the 1920s and the National Marian shrine of Scotland, with a long history of mass pilgrimage and ceremony – set in an expansive, manicured religious complex dotted with a series of statues, monuments and devotional stations.

Plans to build a Famine monument in Carfin began in 1999, when two members of Coatbridge parish and its priest Fr Eamonn Sweeney (himself born in Mayo) formed a commemorative committee in the wake of the 150th anniversary.[32] The Famine monument was constructed and assembled

31 General Register Office for Scotland, *Scotland Census Results Online*, 2001.

32 Details of the Carfin memorial project provided in interview with Fr Eamonn Sweeney (Carfin Lourdes Grotto), 31 April 2005; and Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, Scotland, *Unveiling of the National Monument (Scotland) to the Victims of*

an gorta mór - The Great Famine
To honour the memory of all those
who died, suffered and emigrated to Scotland
due to the Great Famine in Ireland 1845 - 1851
This memorial was unveiled by An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern T.D.
on 20 June 2001

Figure 5.3
National Irish Famine Monument (Scotland), Carfin, Scotland (2001)
Irish Famine Commemoration Committee Scotland

alongside two pre-existing Irish elements at the Grotto (a statue of St Patrick and a mass rock, both added in the 1930s); this newly demarcated 'Irish site' joined two similar shrines dedicated to local Polish and Lithuanian immigrant communities. The monument itself is a conventional high cross with Celtic interlace design, built in Indian granite and designed by local monument sculptor John McGuigan, with two flanking black granite panels incised with maps of Scotland, Ireland, and various scenes taken from 1840s *Illustrated London News* engravings. The main inscription on the memorial itself is a near-identical copy of that found on the *National Famine Memorial* in Mayo: 'To honour the memory of all those who died, suffered and emigrated to Scotland due to the Great Famine in Ireland 1845-1851', extending the Famine end date by one year and omitting the phrase 'and the victims of all famine'. A further interpretative inscription gives the history of the statue, rock and memorial, ending with the words 'It commemorates those who perished and those who survived and made a life for themselves and their offspring in Scotland.' £30,000 was raised for the memorial project, with large contributions coming in from the Irish government and Celtic Football Club.

Conflict over Carfin's project began in response to the announcement that Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern would speak at the monument's unveiling ceremony planned for February 2001, following his attendance at a Celtic-Rangers football match earlier that day.[33] Local Labour MP Frank Roy contacted the Irish consulate and expressed his concern at the coincidence of the two events, suggesting that the visit of the Taoiseach to the monument was 'ill-timed' and would add fuel to the fire of sectarian violence in the area. The Irish government promptly cancelled the visit to Carfin, sparking outrage and heavy coverage of the controversy in Scottish local media.[34] Many commentators expressed embarrassment that football-related sectarian conflict was such (in imagination or reality) as to endanger the safety of the Taoiseach, and challenged the audacity of Roy to take such steps without consultation. Underlying the anger directed at Roy were issues of policing and other conflicts between Westminster and the devolved Scottish Parliament's jurisdictions, and a simmering vehemence of public opinion as to the existence and/or impact of sectarianism in greater Glasgow. An editorial in the *Evening Times* summed up the sentiments of many contributors, declaring, 'Mr Roy's intervention has merely served to paint Scotland as a

the Great Famine in Ireland 1845–51 (Carfin, Lanarkshire: National Pilgrimage Centre), Programme.

33 The rivalry between Glasgow's two main football teams, Celtic F.C. and Rangers F.C., has long been associated with Catholic/Protestant sectarian conflict in Scotland, and marred by recurrent violence and unrest following matches.

34 See the *Evening Times* (Glasgow) and the *Herald* (Glasgow), 10 February-21 June.

bigoted backwater where the misplaced obsessions of an ignorant minority are allowed to dictate the national agenda.'[35]

After a few weeks' worth of furious newsprint, Roy's subsequent resignation as parliamentary secretary to Scottish Secretary Helen Liddell, and a rescheduled memorial unveiling for June, the fracas bubbled down and Ahern's second visit went off without further dispute. As Coatbridge priest Fr Sweeney observed, the high profile generated by the controversy constituted a 'blessing in disguise': heightened coverage boosted visitor numbers to the Grotto, a £10,000 funding shortfall was quickly realized, and the RSVP list for the unveiling (originally littered with polite refusals from local politicians) now burst with acceptances from the great and good, all wishing to show solidarity with the cause of anti-sectarianism.

In retrospect, several interesting elements of the monument itself and its subsequent public response warrant closer attention. The first was the choice of the committee to erect a memorial conceived as the 'National Monument' of Scotland within a Catholic shrine. Although during the controversy committee members insisted on the ecumenical nature of the commemoration and dedication ceremony (clearly a prudent choice given the political climate), the site contradicts such a description, flanked as it is by the Scottish, Irish and Papal flags, and nowhere on the monument itself is this idea referenced. Indeed, the monument's inscription refers exclusively to 'the contribution made by the Irish to Catholicism and society in Scotland'; its iconography, location and inscription allows for no other interpretation than the situation of Scottish Famine memory squarely in the domain of Irish Catholic heritage. Furthermore, public concerns over sectarianism as expressed in news coverage and letters to the editor were almost entirely grounded in local politics and experience, not via any perceived historical grievance between Ireland and England or the broader politics of blame and apology: arguments over Britain's culpability for the Famine that featured prominently in the Dáil and Seanad discussions in 1995 and 1997 were nowhere resurrected. Irish rhetoric too had changed in the wake of the Good Friday agreement, and Bertie Ahern's own political transition from opposition leader to Taoiseach can be mapped against two of his statements on the Famine from 1995 and 2001: his insistence during the Dáil debates that 'I resent and reject the views of people who believe that we should be apologists for what happened […] and "go soft on the issue,"'[36] and his Scottish unveiling speech in 2001 referring to 'a new relationship between Britain and Ireland founded on a recognition of past difficulties and a

35 Editorial, 'Why Bigotry Row Caught Roy Offside.' *Evening Times* (Glasgow), 12 February 2001.

36 Dáil Éireann Debates, *Questions, Oral Answers: Great Famine Commemoration.*

determination to resolve the remaining problems through dialogue and in a spirit of reconciliation.'[37] The Carfin commemoration's rapid absorption into these local debates indicates how Famine memory and history may function as a touchstone for contemporary agendas specific to place: perhaps ironically, in local consciousness it will likely be remembered as a gesture against sectarianism, though this is nowhere apparent or visible in its design.

And what of this design? In the flurry of public debate the memorial itself was hardly discussed nor evaluated in any aesthetic or artistic terms; few voices in the debate seem to have actually even seen it. The choice of the Celtic cross form in the setting of a Catholic grotto is predictable, given the form's close association with monumentalism and remembrance of the dead, not to mention its inexpensive design, ease of construction and widely understood 'Irish' resonance. Similar to many other diasporic memorials, the Carfin Irish site relies heavily on evoking nineteenth-century associations, strengthened here by the presence of the mass rock and replicated *Illustrated London News* images. Its form is consistent with the other bland, mass-produced religious monuments in the Grotto, unfortunately with little (aside from inscriptions) conveying any particulars of local or regional experiences of the Famine. Without disregarding its value and interest as a commemorative gesture, its lack of appeal as public artwork and location within an insular ecclesiastical landscape will probably encourage very few visits on its own merit – and its status as 'National' memorial will likely be eclipsed should plans for a new Glasgow city-based memorial come to fruition.[38]

Liverpool

The Famine memorial dedicated in Liverpool in 1998 (Fig. 5.4) shares several points of symmetry with Carfin, as a 'national monument' of sorts (the only Famine monument constructed in England, and the first in Britain), with a roughly similar construction budget fuelled by another volunteer committee, also challenged by its location in a city marked by historical and contemporary sectarian tensions. Like Glasgow, Liverpool is home to one of the oldest and most established Irish diasporic communities in Britain. It was a major departure point for ships leaving Ireland and Britain during the nineteenth century, serving as both transit point and permanent settlement for many fleeing the effects of the Famine, and a favoured destination point

37 Bertie Ahern, *Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D. at the Unveiling of the Famine Memorial at Carfin, Scotland*, Carfin: 20 June 2001 (Department of the Taoiseach). Available www.gov.ie/taoiseach/press/.

38 'Memorial to Irish Famine Wins Backing of Ministers.' *The Herald (Scotland)*, 29 October 2012.

Figure 5.4
Liverpool Famine Memorial, Eamonn O'Doherty, Liverpool, England (1998)
The Great Famine Commemoration Committee

for Irish migrants to Britain throughout the twentieth century.[39] Currently twinned with the city of Dublin, Liverpool's modern population has retained strong connections with Ireland, manifested in local Irish cultural centres, a diverse constellation of Irish heritage groups and the large Irish Studies department at the University of Liverpool, though until the 1990s public recognition of the Famine's impact on the city's demography and built fabric lay relatively dormant.[40]

The project to construct a memorial to the Famine in the city began as a formal collaborative effort in 1994 in anticipation of the 150th anniversary, drawing in participation from a number of Irish community groups and headed by local historian Greg Quiery and Dr Ian McKeane from the University of Liverpool.[41] However, unlike the Carfin monument, the Liverpool committee conceived of its commemoration as public artwork from the outset, and the Liverpool Great Hunger Commemoration Committee (initially populated primarily by Irish Liverpudlians of both recent and Famine-era descent) was eventually augmented by representation from city arts officers and community artists, who guided the committee through an extensive public competition process. Funding of approximately £50,000 (including in-kind donations) was largely realized through private giving, much of it small donations from local individuals. However, both the Irish and British governments contributed £5,000 each to the initiative – the former (channelled through the budget of the National Commemoration Committee) more willingly than the latter (the subject of much negotiation with both John Major and Tony Blair's administrations and local MPs). Several sites (including the Metropolitan Cathedral) were considered, with St Luke's Anglican Church selected as the final project site. St Luke's itself was dedicated as a civilian monument to the Blitz after it was bombed in 1941 and its interior completely destroyed. Now owned by the city, the ruined church and grounds of St Luke's were preserved as a public contemplative space; the decision to locate Liverpool's Famine memorial here was considered complementary to this atmosphere and supported by the local Anglican diocese and the city of Liverpool (which donated the site) as an openly ecumenical

39 Frank Neal, 'Black '47: Liverpool and the Irish Famine.' In *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster-American Folk Park, 1997), 123–36. See also John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool Irish, 1800–1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

40 For an insightful longitudinal study of Famine memory and commemoration in Liverpool see also McMahon, 'Ports of Recall.'

41 Information (and subsequent quotes) with respect to the construction process derived from interview with Greg Quiery and Frank McIver (Liverpool Famine Commemoration Committee), 12 March 2005, and Interview with O'Doherty (2006).

project. Relations between the committee and local Catholic hierarchy proved more problematic: unable to reach an agreement on locating the memorial at the Metropolitan Cathedral (the initially preferred site), Catholic leaders declined further participation with the committee's efforts and remained conspicuously absent from subsequent related activities.[42]

Submissions for the monument's design were solicited in an open competition, receiving approximately seventy to eighty entries. The sculptural brief requested an abstract design and suggested the use of Irish stone; committee members reflecting on this choice commented on an excess of figural sculptures already in Liverpool, and their belief that abstract sculpture would constitute a more inclusive approach. Despite receiving a wide variety of sculptural concepts of 'a very high standard', Chairman Greg Quiery noted that a design incorporating familiar, traditional elements was preferred over a more challenging artwork, encouraging community ownership of the memorial and avoiding public alienation from the project: 'We wanted something where the community could feel it was theirs, that they would come and be photographed beside it and it would in some way express feelings that they could identify with.' Concern over possible negative responses to the memorial had been heightened by the recent vandalization of a Fenian monument in Liverpool's Ford Cemetery, and Quiery emphasized the committee's conscious avoidance of any semblance of sectarianism:

> We went to great pains to let people know there was no religious connotation, that it was purely commemorative [...] There is a history of sectarian conflict in the city, and we always had to be aware of that. The war in Ireland was still on, so we had to be careful of all that.

A design by Eamonn O'Doherty was eventually selected and unveiled in 1998, the second of his eventual trio of Famine monuments. The memorial comprises a modern interpretation of a standing stone constructed in Mourne granite, split down the middle with a bronze cross aligned along the seam and chiselled inscription in Irish and English: '*Coínnich cuimhne ar an Gorta Mór* 1845-52 / Remember the Great Irish Famine 1845-52.' According to O'Doherty, the sequence of small St Bridget's crosses comprising the main cross was intended to recall its use as a fertility symbol, alluding to the catastrophic disruption of natural processes (birth, death and sustenance) which occurred during the Famine years.[43] An empty bronze bowl elevated on a plinth mirrors this fracture, flanked by two interpretative panels featuring a

42 A separate series of commemorative events were planned and carried out by clergy at St Anthony's parish, Scotland Road.

43 Interview, Eamonn O'Doherty (2006).

short history of the Famine and its impact on Liverpool in English and Irish. The central image of broken stone and bowl drew further inspiration from Isaiah 24:4 and 24:19: 'The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth [...] The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken.' In its inscription (exhorting 'Let us continue the work of helping those displaced by famine and disease in many parts of the world. Let us dismantle those systems which still cause suffering') the memorial echoed the discourse of contemporary famine relief championed by President Robinson, a message favoured by the Liverpool committee that diverted focus away from possible nationalist readings of the monument, and aligned with city council politics emphasizing social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding.

For committee members the standing stone materially resonated as a marker of the 'vanished presence' of those Famine Irish who came to Liverpool, their traces obscured through death or emigration. Standing stone symbology has commonly featured in Famine memorial projects,[44] though O'Doherty's piece offers a sensitive adaptation opposed to slavish simulacra, and was directly influenced by Ulrich Rückriem's stone sculptures and their synthesis of monumentality, material awareness and adaptation as Holocaust commemorations.[45] As a signifier of Irish pre-modern culture, the standing stone image is recognizable yet translated here as a contemporary object, thus fulfilling the brief of the committee and rendering it more easily receptive to newly conceived commemorative narratives. Details such as its physical orientation towards Ireland and the U.S. and the contrast of its rusticated surface against the neo-Gothic shell of St Luke's add subtle interest; a minimal inscription helps retain focus on its clean lines and elemental materials of stone and bronze. In comparison with other submissions to the competition, which recreated garden landscapes intertwined with stonework, or replicated interior domestic settings, O'Doherty's piece retains the traditional, conservative aesthetic of a vertical monument in a small plaza – a restrained and simple intervention in a space already dominated by the skeletal remains of St Luke's decaying architecture.

The construction of the Liverpool memorial was accompanied by the committee's development of an 'Irish Heritage Trail' (completed in 2003), within which the monument was centrally featured.[46] The simultaneous

44 See subsequent discussion of the Western New York Famine Memorial in Buffalo, NY.

45 By way of comparison, see Ruckreim's Hamburg monument *Platz der Jüdischen Deportierten (Square of the Deported Jews)*, 1983.

46 A brochure accompanying the Trail maps fifteen sites of Irish interest in Liverpool and neighbouring Birkenhead, beginning with the Liverpool Famine Monument. Corresponding sites have been marked with commemorative plaques (in English and Irish) added by the Great Hunger Commemoration Committee (*Liverpool and the Great*

creation/invention of multiple 'sites of memory' in this manner reflects apprehension over the erasure of memory within local landscapes, especially as community demographics shift and minority histories fall below the public preservation threshold. In the case of Liverpool, its Irish Heritage Trail contains several derelict buildings (and a former paupers' graveyard which is now a car park) whose meaning is only discernable via a series of recently-installed plaques and narratives found in the brochure guide. Although there is no guarantee that adherence of a metal plaque to a building will save it from destruction, the reconstitution of such sites within a heritage or tourist network imbues them with new value and visibility within the civic sphere.[47] Aligning Irish memory preservation alongside civic priorities forms another strategy of resistance: the heritage brochure describes the Famine monument as representing 'the coming together of contrasting cultures here in Liverpool', thus fashioning the effort as a contribution towards Liverpool's broader social policies supporting multiculturalism.[48]

Enfolding a new monument to the Famine within a pre-existing memorial site to the Blitz offered further opportunity to transfer strength from a potent, actively commemorated memorial context to a relatively obscure one. The fragile yet surviving exterior of St Luke's Church suggests qualities of steadfastness and perseverance in the face of war and devastation; no contemporary artwork is necessary to mediate the experience, nor remind viewers of its deeply felt, living memory. In contrast, the decision to create a contemporary monument in a more central, powerfully charged site speaks to the committee's intent to foreground Famine memory in a vacuum of historical awareness and profile. Although temporally separate and of vastly different national and local significance, each memorial mourns losses suffered by a civilian population, omitting donor names or recognition of any single individual – proxies for desolation and disappearances otherwise impalpable within the modern city.

Neither monument is as it appears at first glance: the church is no ancient ruin, but recently destroyed; the standing stone is located in the

Hunger: A Heritage Trail (Liverpool: Great Hunger Commemoration Committee, Liverpool), Pamphlet).

47 An image of the Famine monument now appears prominently on the main Liverpool tourism website (VisitLiverpool.com), and Walking Trail brochures are widely available from tourism offices. One of the trail's sites, the Albert Dock gates, has since been awarded listed building status. According to Quiery, the walking tours have since proved very popular and well-attended.

48 Indeed, Liverpool has been at the forefront of U.K. cities initiating recent cultural projects addressing the U.K.'s historical and contemporary legacies of migration and related social history, including the International Slavery Museum (2007) and the Museum of Liverpool (2011).

traditional place of a churchyard cemetery and mimes a funereal form, but marks no graves. Evoking neither triumphalism nor political grievance, their mutually reinforcing aesthetics encourage heightened public relevance and visibility, complementing rather than competing with one another via points of formal and conceptual intersection. If, like other Famine commemorative projects, the Liverpool Famine Memorial is circumscribed by both local and national politics of public memory (particular to the Famine and more broadly constituted), its formal outcome exemplifies the benefits of arts professionals working with community groups to realize considered works of public memorial art, and the combined impact of site and sculpture makes for one of the most successfully realized Famine monuments in the diaspora.

The high cross and Celtic Canada

The most common form adopted globally by contemporary Famine commemorations is the Irish high cross, with several dozen recent examples in Ireland and abroad. More than two dozen recent examples in Ireland and abroad can be found. Whilst the majority of these monuments in Ireland have served as new markers for Famine burial grounds, in the diaspora the high cross' adaptation for a variety of civic settings connotes meanings extending far beyond a funereal purpose. Whether or not sited in locations with tangible Famine significance, diasporic high crosses have functioned as proximate markers of mourning for absent Famine victims, celebratory tributes to ethnic heritage and ancestral roots, assertions of minority Irish Catholic identity within majority cultures, and repossessions of forgotten spaces of local Irish significance. A singularly concentrated and interconnected group of cross memorials may be found along the Canadian eastern seaboard, including examples in Kingston and Maidstone (Ontario), Grosse Île and Québec City (Québec), and a number of local communities across the province of New Brunswick, including its largest city, Saint John.[49] Remarkably, each of the memorials in these three provinces adopts the 'Celtic' or high cross form,[50] and their individual translations offer compelling demonstrations of how a single symbol may be activated across local, regional and national spheres, support a range of commemorative

49 See Appendix. Several of these monuments are sited at former quarantine islands, including examples at Grosse Île (Québec), and Partridge Island, Hospital Island and Middle Island (New Brunswick).

50 Apart from the major Famine memorial located in Toronto (discussed in Chapter 6) and the newer monument at Grosse Île, no other post-1990 Canadian commemoration documented to date features a form other than the 'Celtic' cross.

narratives, and perpetuate symbolic associations contiguous with nineteenth-century political and cultural meanings.

In numerous interviews, committee members have described the high cross as a 'natural' choice for a Famine monument, but what has influenced this perception? The popularity of the high cross as a symbol of Irish ethnicity, commemoration and burial dates from the nineteenth century; its enigmatic medieval history has largely been supplanted in the popular imagination with nationalist and romantic significations established less than two centuries ago. The distinctive basic form of the free-standing upright high cross, its arms and shaft interlocked within a ring, first appears in the later part of the eighth century at sites in Britain and Ireland.[51] Their specific origin remains unknown and their function equally mysterious; yet, whilst early medieval crosses likely served a variety of ceremonial purposes, marking burials was not one of them. The components of the high cross structure include a stepped base, shaft and ring, and capstone; surfaces range from plain to highly decorated, with ornamental Insular-style designs preceding the advent of complex figurative scenes.[52] Certain varieties of this early interlace Insular ornament are thought to be Mediterranean in origin; ironically there is nothing purely 'Celtic' about them. However, knowledge of the hybridity of medieval artistic influence and exchange is relatively confined within academic scholarship, whilst in the popular vernacular 'Celtic' has come to be understood as synonymous with 'Irish', and widely applied to a broad range of stylistic characteristics (including both figurative and interlace patterns) associated with a loose conception of a uniquely Irish cultural and artistic heritage.

In any case, the association of the high cross form with burial and an idyllic Irish past dates from the flourishing of 'native' Irish visual artforms during the Celtic Revival of the mid-nineteenth century.[53] In the absence of specific knowledge of the crosses' origin and purpose, they were identified as products of a mythical Irish arcadia that predated the arrival of the British

51 The canonical work of scholarship on Irish high crosses remains Peter Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey*, 3 vols (Bonn: Habelt, 1992). My thanks to Dorothy Kelly (School of Archaeology, University College Dublin) for sharing her expertise on Irish high crosses and their historiography.

52 Françoise Henry's extensive work on the high cross has established the most widely accepted general chronology of their sculptural evolution: Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, revised 1965 ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1940); Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period (1020–1170 A.D.)* (London: Methuen & Co., 1970).

53 Jeanne Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival, 1830–1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980); Peter Murray, *George Petrie (1790–1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past* (Cork/Kinsale: Gandon Editions/Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, 2004).

and were promoted as signifiers of a distinctive Gaelic cultural identity in the service of Irish nationalism. The appropriation of early medieval Irish symbols for prominent political funerals and commemorations (particularly Daniel O'Connell's round tower tomb in Glasnevin Cemetery from 1869 and the Celtic crosses erected across Ireland to commemorate the Manchester Martyrs after 1867[54]) reflects the triumph of this form and its association with Irish patriotism, sacrifice and national identity. Major monuments featuring 'Celtic' symbology also prompted the 'craze' for personal gravestones in the shape of Celtic crosses for ordinary individuals (superseding obelisks and other funerary forms drawn from classical models),[55] a fashion whose popularity continues today. However, whilst many variations of the Celtic cross were used and invented in Ireland during the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, including multi-panelled figurative crosses, simplified abstract interlace designs or plain shaft-and-ring forms,[56] in the post-war period the latter two categories have been more commonly employed, and the range of expression has consequently narrowed.[57]

In the Famine commemorative context, the elaborate figurative high cross, with its biblical scenes and densely packed narrative surfaces, has seldom been reproduced in the contemporary period, with a few exceptions (notably the Famine monument erected in Portland, Oregon in 2008, a full-scale reproduction of Clonmacnoise's 'Cross of the Scriptures', c. 900).[58] Rather, it is the highly decorative scrollwork and zoomorphic/abstract interlace (Insular) designs that are most frequently adopted in contemporary commemorations, likely owing to their lower costs of reproduction, less obscure iconography and closer approximation to what popularly signifies 'Celtic' or 'Irish' visually. As noted in Chapter 4, an important aspect of the Famine's commemoration has been the frequent commissioning of professional monumental carvers/masons in place of sculptors trained within the

54 Judith Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture: A History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 116.

55 Peter Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland* vol 1, 5; see also Shane O'Shea, *Death and Design in Victorian Glasnevin* (Dublin: Dublin Cemeteries Committee, 2000). It should be noted, however, that Victorian high cross funeral monuments remained expensive undertakings; perhaps ironically they almost never featured as burial markers for Famine deaths nearly contemporary with their formal development.

56 Hill, *Irish Public Sculpture*, 189–90.

57 The influence of the starkly geometric and minimalist grave commemorations of the First and Second World Wars, the separation of the monument-carving profession from sculptural fine art practice, and the prohibitive cost of elaborate monuments have all likely contributed to this shift in funerary fashion, and increased standardization of Celtic cross forms.

58 Other examples include Québec City (2000) and Jersey City, NJ (2011), both of which mesh medieval, nineteenth-century and contemporary iconography in their panelled decoration.

fine art tradition. As a consequence, many community high cross Famine monuments in Ireland and the diaspora have been produced from funerary templates, themselves derived from nineteenth-century (not medieval) models, with little creative alteration.

The journey of the high cross symbol from medieval Irish relic to modern Famine monument is exemplified by the giant (46ft/14m) stone cross perched on the southwestern edge of Grosse Île, Québec (Fig. 5.5).[59] Overlooking the St Lawrence River, the Grosse Île cross erected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1909 is one of the oldest and largest Famine monuments in existence, and is today the most prominent symbol of Canadian Famine memory (rivalled only by the 'Black Stone' of Montreal of 1859, which bears an equally tumultuous history, if less influential form[60]). Grosse Île served as a quarantine station for the Canadian government from 1832 to 1947, processing millions of immigrants en route to the Canadian mainland. By the 1830s the Irish already constituted the largest proportion of immigrants to Canada, but nothing prepared officials for the massive and desperate influx of Irish immigrants following the first year of Famine in 1845 and the years subsequent; more than 5,000 Irish people are estimated to have died at Grosse Île in 1847 alone, and more than 10,000 Irish immigrants are buried

59 Grosse Île is one of the best-documented Famine commemorative sites: see Marianna O'Gallagher, *Grosse Île: Gateway to Canada 1832–1937* (Québec: Carraig Books, 1984); Michael Quigley, 'Grosse Île: "The most important and evocative Great Famine site outside of Ireland."' In *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster-American Folk Park, 1997), 25–40; Lorrie Blair, '(De)Constructing the Irish Famine Memorial in Contemporary Québec.' In *Ireland's Great Hunger: Silence, Memory, and Commemoration* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 311–29; Rhona Richman-Kenneally, 'Now You Don't See It, Now You Do: Situating the Irish in the Material Culture of Grosse Île.' *Éire-Ireland* 38, Fall/Winter (2003): 33–53; and McGowan, *Creating Canadian Historical Memory*.

60 Constructed in 1859, the 'Black Rock' or Ship Fever Monument marks the former burial site of victims of Montreal's 1847 typhus epidemic, and has subsequently functioned as an important site of Irish commemoration in the city. See McMahon, 'Ports of Recall'; Colin McMahon, 'Montreal's Ship Fever Monument: An Irish Famine Memorial in the Making.' *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 48–60; McGowan, *Creating Canadian Historical Memory*. A large granite boulder erected by workers involved with the construction of Victoria Bridge, its form prioritized visibility (and likely low cost and speed of construction) over formal finish or symbolic meaning. Not intended initially as an exclusively 'Irish' monument, its significance as a 'Famine' monument is a product of later associations. Although the adoption of 'megaliths' as Famine commemoration was popularized during the 1990s (as discussed later in this chapter), it would have been a rather unorthodox choice for a 'formal' Irish monument of the period. Indeed, in 1897 the Black Rock was derided by local Catholic leader Justice Frank Curran as 'that primitive rock', and calls were made in the local press for an alternative, more 'authentically Irish' monument to be constructed: McMahon, 'Montreal's Ship Fever Monument,' 51.

on the island. Thousands of Irish children orphaned en route to Canada (or shortly thereafter) were subsequently adopted by Québecois families; survivors of this terrible period went on to establish new lives in Canada and beyond. Thus the story of Grosse Île is inextricably bound with the origins of Irish Canadian citizenship, and its Irish cemeteries and monument exist as unparalleled sites of symbolic cultural meaning. Remarkably, amongst Famine sites Grosse Île has received a regular stream of annual pilgrims from the nineteenth century to the present day:[61] one such pilgrimage to the island by AOH members in 1897 for the 50th anniversary of the 1847 crisis sparked the idea for an additional permanent memorial and conservation of the Irish graves, by then falling into disrepair. The granite cross monument was designed by Jeremiah Gallagher, president of the Québec chapter of the AOH, and $5,000 in funds were raised over a period of twelve years; some 9,000 people attended the monument's unveiling in 1909.[62]

Located at the highest point of the island on 'Telegraph Hill', the Celtic cross faces outwards towards the river along the path of approach. Its form loosely follows the template of ancient crosses, with a rough-hewn stepped base, undecorated shaft with ring, and a slightly angled top suggesting a capstone. Though this represents one of the earliest known examples of the high cross as a Famine monument, it would have been familiar by this stage as a funerary type in widespread use and thus appropriate in its proximity to the mass Irish graves on the island. However, the large size of the monument is an unusually aggressive aesthetic gesture, with its primary orientation outwards towards the river, not inwards towards the graves. That this monument serves not simply as proxy for remembrance and reflection, but as statement of defiance and declamatory purpose, is echoed in three of its inscriptions (in English, French and Irish). Though one might naturally assume the panels are translations of one another, in fact the texts differ substantially. Kathleen O'Brien has analyzed these texts with reference to their language, focus and omissions, reading the contrasting messages they present as evidence of a split commemorative understanding amongst linguistic communities: the English panel offers perhaps the most neutral dedication, though pointed reference is made to emigrants' 'preservation of the faith' and dedication on the Feast of the Assumption; the French inscription refocuses attention on French Canadian Catholic participation in relief efforts (with reference to victims 'consoled and fortified by the Canadian priest'), and the Irish message is the most emotive and accusatory

61 In 2009, Grosse Île was again selected as one of three sites to host the Irish government's newly devised National Day of Famine Commemoration, along with Toronto and Skibbereen.

62 O'Gallagher, *Grosse Île*, 83–104.

Figure 5.5
Famine Memorial, Jeremiah Gallagher, Grosse Île, Québec, Canada (1909) Ancient Order of Hibernians

(describing 'Children of the Gael' 'fleeing tyrannical foreign laws and an artificial famine').[63] As O'Brien notes, very few participants in the commemoration would have been able to read the Irish inscription by 1909, hence this text in particular, with its inflammatory language carved out in an Irish script, acts visually to reinforce the Celticized resonances of the cross form while rhetorically reflecting the nationalist ideologies of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The suffering of Irish immigrants was thus bounded via text and image within the domain of Irish Catholic nationalism, despite the large numbers of Irish Protestants also buried on the island, and the Celtic cross established as major icon of Irish Canadian Famine memory.

Despite annual pilgrimages continuing into the 1920s, public prominence and awareness of its monument languished after Grosse Île's quarantine

63 Kathleen O'Brien, 'Language, Monuments, and the Politics of Memory in Québec and Ireland.' *Éire-Ireland* Spring/Summer (2003): 141–60.

station closed in 1937, public access ceased and the site slipped into decay.[64] Early efforts to preserve and recognize the significance of Grosse Île began in the 1970s, spearheaded by Jeremiah Gallagher's granddaughter, Irish historian and activist Marianna O'Gallagher,[65] and in 1974 it was designated a national historic site by the Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada (HSMBC). Following on from the HSMBC's identification of 'immigration' as one of its principal heritage themes in 1984, in 1988 the island was officially transferred to the jurisdiction of Parks Canada and discussions reopened with reference to its development as a heritage site.[66]

However, between 1988 and 2002 the development of what would become 'Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site' evolved into a bitterly fought campaign to determine the interpretative framework of Grosse Île.[67] In one camp lay Parks Canada and its associated heritage agencies; in the other, various Irish lobbying groups and individuals who, through a series of public campaigns, voiced their displeasure with a perceived 'silencing' of the Irish dimension of Grosse Île's history. As a quarantine centre in operation from 1832 to 1937, the island played a major role in Canadian immigration history for over a century. Parks Canada's initial recommendations for the site's development in 1992 thus focused on integrating the story of Grosse Île within a broader national narrative of immigration and arrival, encapsulated in the phrase 'Canada: Land of Welcome and Hope'. Based on market research investigating possible themes

64 An intended centenary pilgrimage to the Grosse Île cross organized by the AOH in 1947 was thwarted when the island was deemed unsafe by the government due to its use for bacterial research and weapons testing.

65 O'Gallagher (1929–2010) authored the primary accounts of the island's early history and is widely credited with reviving Irish community interest in the site. See also Ronald Rudin and Robert McMahon, 'Remembering a Memory' (Film), Concordia University/ Royal Ontario Museum, 2011, available at http://rememberingamemory.concordia.ca.

66 The island comprises many extant structures related to its function as a quarantine facility and later purposes (many of which are unrelated to the Irish experience); contemporary visits to the island include a guided tram tour, encounters with costumed interpreters in its historic buildings, and visits to the southwestern end of the island where its Irish monuments are located.

67 A case study published in 2003 reviewed the process of Grosse Île's development, though primarily from Parks Canada's perspective: Margaret G.H. MacLean and David Myers, *Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site: A Case Study* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2003), available at http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/grosse_ille.html. An earlier MA thesis provides a corrective of sorts to the Getty study, lending greater voice to those opposed to Parks Canada's plans: Colin McMahon, 'Quarantining the Past: Commemorating the Great Irish Famine on Grosse-Île' (Unpublished MA thesis, Concordia University, 2001).

for development, the following statement was also included with reference to Famine history on the island:

> It is also felt that there should not be too much emphasis on the tragic aspects of the history of Grosse Île. On the contrary, the painful events of 1832 to 1847, which have often been overemphasized in the past, need to be put back into perspective, without robbing them of their importance.[68]

These words would cast a long shadow over Parks Canada's relationship with Irish interest groups and set the stage for the conflict that followed.

Newspaper editorials, public petitions, letter writing campaigns and a series of public hearings soon signalled to government officials that significant numbers of Irish Canadians were very unhappy with the development concept as presented.[69] Opposition groups formed (most visibly Action Grosse Île) who objected to the 1992 concept and in particular the marketing recommendations to downplay the site's tragic history. Viewed from their opponents' perspective, such plans sought to prioritize the politics of multiculturalism (particularly contentious given divisive separatist politics in the province of Québec[70]) and a feel-good narrative over its darker ties to Irish and Irish Canadian history. Concern over the obliteration of the memory of the dead and the transformation of the site into a perceived leisure zone thus sparked protestors' anger, with explicit reference made in some petitions to historical revisionism debates then current in Ireland itself.[71] Adding visual fuel to the fire was a postcard petition campaign featuring an image of the 1909 cross monument, reproducing and translating its nationalist Irish inscription.[72] That many submissions of protest to Parks Canada were supported by nationalist readings of Irish history, political grievances tied to the then-current Northern Irish political impasse, and the rhetoric of 'race extermination'

68 Parks Service Environment Canada, *Grosse Île National Historic Site: Development Concept* (Ottawa, 1992), 62. Details of this market research project can also be found in Blair, '(De)Constructing the Irish Famine Memorial,' 313–14.

69 Parks Canada collected and presented the results of this initial consultation process in full, including all communications received by the government in connection with the project; a summary of all the findings was published in 1994: Parks Canada, *Grosse Île National Historic Site Report on the Public Consultation Program* (Québec: Canadian Heritage/Parks Canada, 1994).

70 Blair, '(De)Constructing the Irish Famine Memorial,' 322–3; O'Brien, 'Language, Monuments, and the Politics of Memory,' 152–3.

71 Parks Canada, *Grosse Île National Historic Site Report*, 72.

72 O'Brien, 'Language, Monuments, and the Politics of Memory,' 151.

and genocide[73] further foreshadowed the terms of debate which would later dominate the Irish Dáil Famine debates of 1995 and 1996. However, a close reading of the public submissions to Parks Canada similarly reveals a wide spectrum of political opinion and suggested interpretative alternatives, some motivated less by strident Irish republicanism than by the desire to foreground the island's significance as a site of burial, or deliver a more tempered view of Canada's immigration history. As in Ireland, these variable narrations of Famine histories, 'truths' and legacy contrast with contemporary claims to Irish community solidarity or singularity of purpose.

In any case, faced with this vociferous response, a compromised, revised 'commemorative integrity statement' was finally issued in 1998, with a new framework of interpretation and message to be communicated to visitors.[74] The original theme, 'Canada: land of welcome and hope', a concept diametrically opposed to most Irish groups' understanding of the Irish immigrant experience, was abandoned and the story of Irish tragedy at Grosse Île eventually granted much larger significance. This was further reflected by a name shift from 'Grosse Île National Historic Site' to 'Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site', and the addition of a new Irish monument to the development plans.[75]

In the summer of 1997 a competition was announced for the contract to create this contemporary memorial 'to honour the memory of the immigrants – mainly of Irish origin – and quarantine employees who were buried on the island between 1832 and 1937'.[76] Sixty-four proposals were reduced to a shortlist of five, and funds were provided to further develop the proposals and present maquettes of their designs. As Sylvie Gauthier notes in her essay recounting the memorial process, the selection jury included 'two representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage, two from the artistic and architectural communities, two from Canada's Irish community, and one from the federal

73 McGowan, *Creating Canadian Historical Memory*, 13.

74 Québec Field Unit, *Commemorative Integrity Statement: Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site* (Québec: Parks Canada, 1998), Vol. 2003, 44–5. This series of messages was included along with other themes unrelated to the Irish significance of the site, embracing aspects as diverse as the island's palaeohistory and the 'scientific knowledge and the evolution of quarantine' (44).

75 Canadian Heritage, *Contract Announced for the Construction of a Memorial at Grosse Ile and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site* (16 April 1998), Press release, available at http:///www.pch.gc.ca/newsroom. For details of this monument's construction see Sylvie Gauthier, 'Le Mémorial: An Irish Memorial at Grosse Île in Québec.' In *Ireland's Great Hunger: Silence, Memory, and Commemoration* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 294–310.

76 'Instructions for Bidders', qtd. in Gauthier, 'Le Mémorial,' 298.

Department of Public Works and Government Services',[77] an unusually high concentration of governmental participation compared to most other memorials created around the sesquicentennial commemorative period. On 16 April 1998, Minister of Canadian Heritage Sheila Copps announced that the $300,000 contract had been awarded to the team of Émile Gilbert and Associates (architects) and Lucienne Cornet (artist).[78] Unveiled in August 1998, this memorial (Fig. 5.6) consists of four main components: a circular earthwork mound bisected by two channels and built up with dry masonry walls; an interior 'crypt' at the intersection of two transversal pathways containing four niches inset with cast bronze sculptural scenes; a series of large steel 'wings' emerging from the earth along the north-south corridor; and a transparent glass wall containing over 6,000 names of those who perished, framing a mass graveyard beyond. The new monument demonstrates considerable awareness of trends in contemporary commemorative aesthetics popular across many contexts, such as a wall of names, manipulation of levels of landscape to construct spaces of passage and direct the body of the viewer, and the pointed layering of ancient and modern materials (stone, steel, glass). Although the artist and architects emphasized the 'open iconography' of the design, the various elements adopted have particular provenances based on the team's research on Ireland and the resonances intended to materially evoke a sense of 'geography, journeys, the people's lives, suffering, hope'.[79] The project statement included in the unveiling programme articulated these aims:

> The work is a sacred place, in the shape of a mound cut by corridors which, through a series of 'passages', leads us into the earth, a symbol of darkness, before emerging into the light. It proposes a symbolic voyage, making the visitor relive the emotions provoked by the anxiety of a trying crossing, the conclusion of a merciless famine, and by the desire and the hope of discovering a new land.[80]

77 Gauthier, 'Le Mémorial,' 299.

78 Canadian Heritage, *Contract Announced for the Construction of a Memorial at Grosse Ile*.

79 Interview with artist Lucienne Cornet and architects France Laberge and Cesar Herrera (conducted and translated by Sylvie Gauthier, Concordia University), November 1999. My thanks to Gauthier for sharing the transcription of this interview.

80 Lucienne Cornet and Emile Gilbert and Associates, *In Memory of Grosse Île: Inauguration of the Memorial*, Programme. See also Lucienne Cornet and France Laberge, 'Dans la matière, des ténèbres vers la lumière: un voyage symbolique.' *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 27/28, no. 2/1 (2002), 44-65.

Figure 5.6 *Le Mémorial*, Lucienne Cornet (artist), Emile Gilbert and Associates (France Laberge, César Herrera, architects), Grosse Île, Québec, Canada (1998) Department of Canadian Heritage

Intriguingly, a common reading of the monument (replicated also in some guide materials) has seen its form described as a horizontal 'Celtic cross' traversed by the visitor, though this design has been denied by its artist and architects. That the echo of the high cross persists in viewers' perceptions, however, indicates its potency within the visual vocabulary of Irish and Famine commemoration that has allowed its re-surfacing even in the absence of intention.

As both the 1909 and 1998 monuments are today visited along a linear trail linking them directly to one another, comparisons between the two are inevitable and throw into relief their contrasting approaches towards Famine commemoration. Though sharing the cross form and basic materials in common (stone and bronze), they read as an index of changed tastes in commemorative aesthetics over the last century: now horizontal and earth-bound instead of defiantly vertical, consciously contemporary rather than an homage to the antique. These contrasts are of course underlined by the 1998 work's intent to function as a work of art, monument and memorial, where the 1909 work does not concern itself with the first objective. Whilst we may read the 1998 memorial as a product of contemporary memory discourses emphasizing individual experience over communal, the ambiguous over the direct, as an officially conceived and directed monument it is equally shaped by political forces at work in contemporary Canada and Québec. As Gauthier notes, the lack of religious symbols present in the memorial reflects 'the increased secularisation of contemporary society in Québec and Ireland';[81] furthermore, its flexible (rather than explicit) ethnic-specific iconography allows for an 'Irish' reading of the monument whilst still accommodating the island's official mandate of memorializing a broader history of migration. The message articulated by the design is ultimately one of hope and redemption, despite the acknowledgment of suffering and death, in line with the largely upbeat heritage themes predominating the island's overall interpretative scheme. Although the 1909 Grosse Île cross' significance as site of Famine pilgrimage and remembrance has continued (recently evidenced by a large public commemorative ceremony held in 2009 to mark the centenary of its construction), its contemporary monument remains comparatively little known,[82] supporting Gauthier's speculation that the heavy bias of governmental (as opposed to community) control of the project has likely dampened any sense of local ownership.[83]

81 Gauthier, 'Le Mémorial,' 301.

82 During the author's meetings with many other individuals involved in Famine commemorative projects internationally, the history and older cross monument of Grosse Île were well known and referenced, though its contemporary memorial was not.

83 Gauthier, 'Le Mémorial,' 299.

The central place occupied by the AOH cross monument at Grosse Île is replicated in the neighbouring province of New Brunswick at Partridge Island in Saint John harbour, another early quarantine centre marked with a monumental Celtic cross (Fig. 5.7).[84] Today Saint John bills itself as 'Canada's most Irish city', a claim supported by Canadian census figures and levels of ethnic self-identification.[85] The city's eighteenth-century origins in Loyalist settlement were reinforced by British (Scots, English and Irish) migration encouraged following the Napoleonic Wars, with its population quadrupling between 1820 and 1861.[86] Though many immigrants passed through Saint John en route to other destinations, particularly the U.S.,[87] by the 1830s a substantial Irish population had taken root in the province: one that was (by slim majority) Protestant, and for the most part culturally integrated into civic and economic life.[88] Although much of today's Irish population in Saint John can trace its origins to these pre-Famine waves of migration, the transformational character of Irish migration to Saint John during the 1840s has contributed to popular perceptions of the 'Famine Irish' as definitive in shaping local Irish cultural identity.[89] Mid-century Irish migrants – overwhelmingly Catholics from the south and west of Ireland, and increasingly destitute and desperate as a consequence of the Famine – solidified an Irish Catholic majority in the city and deepened divisions between Catholic and Protestant Irish groups.[90] Heightened tensions between established Irish communities and newer arrivals erupted in violent riots between the local Orange Order and the Catholic community, with severe rioting in 1847 and 1849 centred at York Point, the location of Saint

84 Information on the island's history, monuments and Famine anniversary activities provided in part by local historian and preservationist Harold E. Wright: Interview with Harold E. Wright (Heritage Resources/Saint John Famine Commemoration Committee), 28 July 2005. My thanks to Wright for sharing additional information on Partridge Island from the McArthur Collection.

85 According to the 2006 Canadian census, just over 33% of Saint John residents claimed Irish ancestry (www12.statcan.gc.ca).

86 Thomas W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985), 5.

87 Acheson, *Saint John*, 92–114.

88 Peter Toner, 'The Irish of New Brunswick at Mid-Century: The 1851 Census.' In *New Ireland Remembered: Historical Essays on the Irish in New Brunswick*, ed. Peter Toner (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1988), 106–32.

89 Toner, 'The Irish of New Brunswick at Mid-Century,' 106; William A. Spray, '"The Difficulties Came Upon Us Like a Thunderbolt": Immigrants and Fever in New Brunswick in 1847.' In *The Irish in Atlantic Canada, 1780–1900*, ed. Thomas P. Power (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1991), 107–26.

90 Acheson, *Saint John*, 105; Scott W. See, *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativisim and Social Violence in the 1840s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 43–70.

John's most notorious Irish Catholic immigrant ghetto and the disembarkation point for migrants cleared through Partridge Island.[91]

First established as a quarantine island in 1785, Partridge Island functioned as Canada's second busiest quarantine station from 1830 to 1941, processing millions of mariners and immigrants on their way to New Brunswick and beyond. However, like Grosse Île, its long history is dominated by the tragic experiences of the 1840s Irish migration, with 30,000 migrants landing between 1840 and 1845 alone (the 1841 census of Saint John indicates a city resident population of only 19,000).[92] In 1847 more than 15,000 disease-stricken passengers arrived at Partridge Island, overwhelming facilities on the island and public institutions on the mainland;[93] typhus and smallpox afflicted more than 2,500 quarantined that summer on the island, and over 600 were interred there in a mass grave. A wooden cross dating from the 1890s served as the island's primary monument to these Famine burials up until the 1920s, when a 40ft concrete Celtic cross was erected in 1927. Initially developed by the Saint John City Cornet Band (a local Irish Catholic band), the cross was funded by public subscription and designed and built by George McArthur, a local Irish Protestant and project chairman/contractor. Annual pilgrimages to the island organized by the Ancient Order of Hibernians continued during the 1920s and 1930s, and McArthur himself was buried at the foot of the cross in 1932.[94] Removed during the island's military activation during WWII and re-erected in 1948 (with an additional plaque added by the parish of St John the Baptist), the cross was repaired in 1979 and received a major restoration and rededication in 1985.[95] The monument is highly stylized, echoing the basic shape of the Celtic cross yet absorbing a streamlined 1920s modern aesthetic reminiscent of First World War commemorations, and its minimal inscription records the 2,000 victims of typhus in Saint John in 1847, the 600 Irish buried on the island, and the death of Dr (James) Patrick Collins, physician of the station who died whilst tending to victims of the epidemic in 1847. As one of the first major commemorations organized by Saint John's Catholic community, the cross visibly proclaimed Partridge Island as sacred ground in local Irish

91 Gordon M. Winder, 'Trouble in the North End: The Geography of Social Violence in Saint John 1840-1860.' *Acadienses: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* XXIX, no. 2 (2000); See, *Riots in New Brunswick*.

92 Harold E. Wright, 'Partridge Island: Re-Discovering the Irish Connection.' In *The Irish in Atlantic Canada, 1780-1900*, ed. Thomas P. Power (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1991), 127–49.

93 Acheson, *Saint John*, 96.

94 Harold E. Wright, *L'île Partridge Island: A Gateway to North America* (Saint John: Partridge Island & Harbour Heritage Inc., 1995), 41.

95 The 1979 repairs were carried out by Wright, who subsequently raised $100,000 to restore the cross to its 1927 appearance and rededicate it in 1985.

Figure 5.7 *Famine Memorial Cross*, (Partridge Island), George McArthur, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada (1927)
Image courtesy of Harold E. Wright, Heritage Resources

(and specifically Catholic) memory,[96] though symbolic ownership of this commemorative space has been challenged more recently by two additional markers on the island commemorating Jewish and Protestant immigration (the former funded and built by Saint John's Jewish community in 1985, and the latter funded by the Loyal Orange Order in 1994).[97]

While the Partridge Island cross shares elements of scale, site and historical parallel with Grosse Île, its site's evolution has been markedly different. Although the island was inhabited up until the 1940s (at one

96 Greg Marquis, 'Commemorating the Loyalists in the Loyalist City: Saint John, New Brunswick, 1883-1934.' *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 33, no. 1 Fall (2004): 24–33.

97 Unlike the 1927 Cross (which commemorates only the Irish deaths of 1847), the Jewish and Protestant monuments are more broadly 'dedicated to those Jewish immigrants who passed through Partridge Island on their way to Canada and the United States'/'dedicated in memory of all Protestants buried here'.

point supporting its own school) and recognized as a National Historic Site of Canada in 1974, most of its extant buildings had disappeared by the mid-1990s. In 1981 the National Historic Sites of Canada Systems Plan discussed the possible development of Partridge Island as a historic site in conjunction with Grosse Île, but despite vigorous support of local activists (led by Harold E. Wright, who founded the Partridge Island Research Project in 1977 in an attempt to garner support for the island's preservation[98]) funds and government promises faltered and such plans never came to fruition. Wright personally ran tours of the island from 1982 to 1995, but since 1995 it has mostly remained closed to visitors.

Nevertheless, the 1927 cross' public significance for the local Irish community has been periodically revived: in 1967 (the year of Canada's Centennial of Confederation) a 'replica' stone cross monument (Fig. 5.7)[99] was constructed at the foot of Prince William Street and its site renamed 'St Patrick's Square'. The presence of the additional cross in this central civic space amplifies the visual impact of the original cross; when the persistent fog banks lift they can be viewed simultaneously, connected across that waterway which separated the limbo of quarantine from arrival in the New World. Thirty years later, local 150th anniversary efforts built upon this long history of Famine commemoration in Saint John – with two new Famine commemorative monument projects organized by a committee founded in the early 1990s (connected with the Irish Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick [ICCANB]). Both privately funded, they comprised a new Celtic cross marker installed in St Mary's Cemetery in 1994 in memory of the thousands of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants and their descendants buried there,[100] and the rededication of the St Patrick's Square cross and addition of a new plaque to mark the anniversary, unveiled by Irish President Mary Robinson during her Canadian state visit in 1997 (Fig. 5.8). Though these most recent additions to the city's commemorative landscape are rather undistinguished in visual terms, they demonstrate the continuing dominance of Famine-era migration in public narratives of Saint John's Irish history, the unusual longevity of Famine commemorative activity in Saint John, and the

98 See also Wright, 'Partridge Island,' 146–9.

99 Though described in its inscription as a 'half-scale replica' of the Partridge Island cross, apart from sharing the basic Celtic cross form, the two actually bear little resemblance to one another.

100 Recalling the design process of the 1994 memorial, Wright stated that the committee sought a form that connected the past to the present; no other design than the Celtic cross was considered, and the cross was produced by a local monument-maker: Interview with Wright (2005). Across the province, recent Irish and Famine monuments constructed by other local chapters of the ICCANB have also exclusively adopted the Celtic cross form (see Appendix).

Figure 5.8a
Celtic Cross – St. Mary's Cemetery, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada (1994) Irish-Canadian Cultural Association, Saint John

Figure 5.8b
Celtic Cross (1967) and *re-dedication plaque* (1997), St. Patrick's Square, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada St. Patrick's Society and the Irish-Canadian Cultural Association, Saint John Image (2009) courtesy of Harold E. Wright, Heritage Resources

persistent local mobilization of Famine memory via the Celtic cross form, even as Partridge Island itself continues its slow decline.

Similar reincarnations of Famine memory and Irish Canadian presence have continued to a remarkable extent in Kingston, Ontario, a major hub of nineteenth-century migration where five memorials prominently featuring the Celtic cross have been constructed to date. The construction of the Rideau canal between 1826 and 1832 (linking Ottawa to Kingston) relied substantially upon Irish immigrant workforces, some of whom were compensated with land grants and settling rights along the Rideau corridor, though poor working conditions, accidents and the scourge of malaria decimated work crews.[101] Newly established Irish communities (reflected in such place-names as Ballycanoe, Kilmarnock, and Newboyne) subsequently attracted large numbers of chain migrants during the 1840s Famine exodus. Other Famine immigrants who landed at Grosse Île/Québec City and made their way to Montreal via river barges continued along the Rideau canal (or the St Lawrence River) to Kingston, which functioned as transit point to further destinations in upper Canada and the U.S. (bordering Lake Ontario to the south). With news of the disastrous shiploads of typhus-afflicted immigrants arriving at Grosse Île, Kingston officials began preparations for a similar influx: local historians have estimated that approximately 50,000 immigrants passed through Kingston in 1847-8, though precise figures are unknown.[102] Fever sheds hastily erected attempted to deal with the typhus epidemic were soon overwhelmed; additionally, hundreds of Kingstonians contracted the disease and died. Though the majority of Irish immigrants during the 1840s passed through the city successfully or settled permanently in the area, at least 1,400 victims of typhus were buried in a mass grave located at Kingston General Hospital, and approximately 300 Kingston residents who died from typhus during this period were interred at Kingston's Upper Cemetery (now McBurney Park, known locally as 'Skeleton Park').

101 Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).

102 Aside from genealogical chronicles and local histories, relatively little has been formally published on Kingston's Famine history; see Colleen Marie Towns, 'Relief and Order: The Public Response to the 1847 Famine Irish Migration to Upper Canada' (Unpublished MA thesis, Queen's University, 1990). The local journal *Historic Kingston*, published annually by the Kingston Historical Society, also contains some research relating to the period. Information on local commemorations provided in interview with Tony O'Loughlin (Founder and President, Kingston Irish Famine Commemoration Committee/Kingston Irish Folk Club), 21 June 2005. My thanks to O'Loughlin for sharing his knowledge of Kingston's Famine history and details of its commemoration.

The first monument to commemorate these Famine immigrants was erected at the hospital mass gravesite on 6 August 1894 by James Vincent Cleary, Archbishop of Kingston (Fig. 5.9).[103] Known as the 'Angel of Mercy' monument, it is sculpted in Carrara marble and features an angel holding aloft a trumpet and a Bible open to the Resurrection. Below the Angel on a rectangular base is a high relief image of a Celtic cross and two inscriptions (one original in English, and another in Irish written in a Gaelicized script added in 1966 by the Kingston Historical Society). Praise for interdenominational cooperation during the 1847 typhus crisis and calls for Catholic-Protestant 'brotherhood' pervade press coverage of the monument's unveiling in the *Weekly British Whig* and *The Kingston News* of August 1894, though Archbishop Cleary's original proposed inscription describing the immigrants as 'mercilessly evicted from their Irish homes' was considered 'distasteful' by the hospital governors and edited to the milder version seen today.[104] The cross carved on the monument includes abstract 'Celtic' interlace, shamrocks and a harp, thus keeping with the fashion for such Revival-era monuments.

No further commemoration of Irish immigrants to Kingston occurred until the 1990s, when a newspaper article in the *Kingston Whig-Standard* in April of 1990 reported that bones had been found during building works at Kingston General Hospital. Tony O'Loughlin, founder and president of Kingston's Irish Folk Club (KIFC) in 1989, took issue with the lack of response to the article and subsequently formed the Kingston Irish Famine Commemoration Association (KIFCA). O'Loughlin described his motivation behind the commemorative projects as the desire to recognize an aspect of Kingston's history he felt had long been marginalized in the 'heart of Loyalist Canada', and the absence of memorials to working-class and immigrant populations in the region, stating, 'if we don't do it, no one else will'.[105]

Between 1998 and 2002 two additional Celtic crosses were erected through the efforts of the KIFCA and the KIFC. The first cross (1998, Fig. 5.10) commemorates the deaths of Famine immigrants in Kingston's fever sheds, in a small waterfront public green space close to the original location of the sheds and the hospital mass grave, now renamed An Gorta Mór Park. According to O'Loughlin, the design of the cross was taken from an example in Milltown Cemetery, Belfast (most likely again a Revival cross),

103 John Grenville and others, *An Illustrated Guide to Monuments, Memorials & Markers in the Kingston Area* (Kingston: Kingston Historical Society, 2000).

104 Tony O'Loughlin, 'The Last Resting Place of More than 1500 Irish Victims of An Gorta Mor (Kingston Irish Folk Club, 2004), unpublished.

105 Interview with O'Loughlin (2005).

Figure 5.9
'Angel of Mercy' Famine Monument, Kingston General Hospital, Kingston, Ontario, Canada (1892/amended 1966)

its frame is filled with interlace design, the capstone omitted, a shamrock placed at the crossing of the arms, and a ship/harp relief added to the bottom of the shaft on either side. Following the example of Grosse Île, translations of the inscription feature (though here identically) in English, Irish and (partially) French.

The second Irish monument was erected in McBurney ('Skeleton') Park in March 2002 (Fig. 5.11). From 1813 to 1865 the park served as the Upper Burial Ground for Kingston's Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic populations. After its closure the cemetery fell into neglect until it was transformed into a city park in 1893, and the process of relocating burials was begun (though never fully completed).[106] Local folklore of bones unearthed from shallow graves continues into the present day – hence the nickname 'Skeleton Park' – though this macabre history is not physically evident today.

106 The condition of the cemetery in the 1870s and 1880s was an issue of serious public concern, as graves were vandalized and markers destroyed; a local baseball team called the 'Graveyard Nines' purportedly played at the cemetery, using broken headstones as bases. Susan M. Bazely, Earl Moorhead, and Cataraqui Archaeological Research Foundation, *Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment: McBurney Park, Upper Burial Ground (Kingston, Ontario)* (Kingston: City of Kingston, 2003), 24, available at http://www.cityofkingston.ca/pdf/engineering/McBurneyPark_Stage1.pdf.

Figure 5.10
Celtic Cross, An Gorta Mor Park, Kingston, Ontario, Canada (1998) Kingston Irish Famine Commemoration Association

On this shore
more than 1500 Irish, fleeing
THE GREAT HUNGER,
along with compassionate citizens
of many faiths, who cared for them,
died of typhus in the fever sheds
of Kingston 1847 - 1848
WE HOLD THEIR MEMORY SACRED

The KIFC's monument within the park is nearly identical to the 1998 cross (and produced by the same monument company), though the ship and harp plaques are omitted and the four national emblems of the shamrock, thistle, daffodil, and rose (Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England) are incorporated to acknowledge early settlers' countries of origin. Despite the inclusion of these symbols, the shamrock predominates and the inscription (translated into Irish) references only the 'mainly Irish and Scottish immigrants' buried in the park, though this assertion is not supported by a recent archaeological report[107] and somewhat obscures the cemetery's longer history as a mixed burial ground for residents of the city of Kingston.

Two additional monuments commemorating the deaths of Irish workers on the Rideau canal were also erected by the KIFC in 2000 and 2002; again both feature the Celtic cross design. The first memorial (2000, Fig. 5.12) doubles as a public water fountain in Centennial Park, one of Kingston's prime waterfront leisure areas, exhorting thirsty Kingstonians to 'drink this water in memory of an estimated one thousand Irish workers and co-workers who perished during the building of the Rideau canal'. The second Rideau

107 Bazely, Moorhead, and Cataraqui Archaeological Research Foundation, *Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment*, 10.

Figure 5.11
Celtic Cross, McBurney Park,
Kingston, Ontario, Canada (2002)
Kingston Irish Folk Club

Figure 5.12
Rideau Canal Memorial
Drinking Fountain,
Centennial Park, Kingston,
Ontario, Canada (2000)
Kingston Irish Folk Club

Figure 5.13
Rideau Canal Celtic Cross, Kingston, Ontario, Canada (2002)
Kingston Irish Folk Club

memorial (2002, Fig. 5.13) is sited alongside the banks of the canal in Douglas R. Fluhrer Park: it too adopts a nearly identical Celtic cross design to each of the KIFC/KIFCA's other three projects, and was primarily funded via a donation from the Irish government. In a nod to Grosse Île, the Irish inscription facing the canal adopts more inflammatory language than its English counterpart: a reference unintelligible to most viewers, yet one that explicitly positions the monument within the praxis of Irish Canadian Famine commemoration despite the earlier period it commemorates.

The prevalence and dominance of the Celtic cross in these three Canadian gateways (Grosse Île, Saint John and Kingston) is an intriguing phenomenon, undoubtedly influenced by the high profile of the original Grosse Île 1909 monument and communal understandings of this form as an iconic symbol of Irish Catholic cultural identity, commemoration and sacrifice. The reinvigoration of nineteenth-century Catholic nationalist iconography in the service of contemporary Famine remembrance suggests its utility as both resin and residue: reinforcing ethnic social bonds and identities within and across Irish Canadian groups, and generating new sites of memory recognizably situated within a pre-existing commemorative legacy. Such monuments indicate how Canadian Famine memory remains rooted (for the most part) within a minority Irish Catholic tradition, constituted within an officially

'multicultural' nation that maintains an uneasy détente between Anglophone and Francophone heritages: a nation that continues to struggle with how its migration history should be narrated within public space. These monuments – local reassertions of communal ethnic identities and presence, countering the physical erosion of sites of Irish Canadian heritage – offer diverse yet interconnected perspectives of Irish immigrant experience commensurate with contemporary preoccupations, and powerfully demonstrate the flexible application of Famine iconography across space, time and geography.

Imaging genealogy in the United States

Whether historicized, celebrated or eulogized, Irish America has always dominated the story of emigration from Ireland. Historical accounts of the Irish in America have dealt in depth with processes of emigration, assimilation and adaptation from the eighteenth century to the post-war period, with a particular concentration on the nineteenth century, though rather less research (until recently) has been directed towards contemporary cultural and social practices related to memory and identity amongst self-identified Americans of Irish ancestry, without collapsing under the weight of ethnic clichés that encumber much writing on the diaspora. Membership of contemporary 'Irish America' for individuals tracing back their Irish ancestry over several generations remains a vaguely and variously defined position – Irishness as point of origin, ethnic affinity, symbolic attachment, set of cultural practices – and as with any process of identity formation, constitutes a political and personal declaration of kinship.

If definitions – and indeed the contemporary existence – of 'Irish America' persist as the subject of scholarly debate,[108] the demographic pattern of general decline and geographic dispersal of Americans reporting Irish ancestry over the past thirty years is unmistakeable.[109] Meanwhile, interest in asserting and consuming Irish cultural identity and heritage within the United States remains strong as ever, on the evidence of Irish Studies' growth as an academic discipline since the 1990s, the wide

108 Deirdre Moloney, 'Who's Irish? Ethnic Identity and Recent Trends in Irish American History.' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 Summer (2009): 100–9.

109 Ancestry data were first collected by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980; figures on individuals reporting Irish descent are as follows: 1980 (40 million Americans, 18% of total U.S. population); 1990 (38 million, 15.6%); 2000 (30.5 million, 10.8%); 2010 (34.7 million, 11.2%). The traditional association of Irish America with east coast urban enclaves has been further confounded by recent census data: in 2010 Portland, Phoenix, and Cleveland (all home to recently constructed Famine monuments) boasted Irish populations proportionally larger than New York City's.

popularity of mass public events like St Patrick's Day parades and Irish festivals across the United States, and the blossoming of Famine-related commemorative projects from the mid-1990s through to today. Such is the paradox of 'Irish America': if proportionate numbers have declined significantly since 1980, what can explain its amplified presence? What can account for the continued proliferation of opportunities (and desires) to construct and consume variations of Irish ethnic identity, despite the demographic reality of ever-weakening links to immigrant ancestors? Finally, what part has the memory and commemoration of the Famine played in foregrounding and facilitating this activity?

Reginald Byron's socio-anthropological study (2000) of the contemporary Irish American community in Albany, New York is among the few to qualitatively investigate what kinds of knowledge, cultural practices and forms of representation have structured attachments to Irish immigrant ancestry and Irish ethnic self-identification. Based on analyses of survey and interview responses, Byron argues that Irish Americans' actual knowledge of and relation to their Famine-era immigrant ancestors 'testify to the frailty of "social memory" of the Famine and other events in Ireland's past, which are commonly said to inform the ethnic identity of contemporary Irish-Americans.'[110] Dominant historical myths and ethnic characterizations, while recognized by his respondents, informed their own sense of self only sporadically: 'It is becoming increasingly clear that what now constitutes a sense of ethnic identity among Americans who are the descendants of nineteenth-century immigrants is highly variable from one individual to another, and is pre-eminently a matter of biographical experience.'[111] His findings echo Mary Waters' (1990) influential study of the highly selective and 'symbolic' gestures of cultural allegiance that constitute ethnic practices by white Americans of European immigrant descent.[112] For Byron and Waters, the choice to 'be Irish' from amongst various possible strands of genealogical descent, lack of collective consensus on what actually constitutes 'Irish' cultural characteristics, and intermittent engagement with ethnic identity in daily life, all point to a form of ethnicity that is fluid, highly variable and invested with meanings constructed from a mix of popular culture, familial traditions and personal experience.

110 Reginald Byron, *Irish America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 82.

111 Ibid., 265.

112 Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1990). Waters follows Herbert Gans' influential concept of 'symbolic ethnicity': Herbert Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 1-20.

Both studies further suggest that as everyday 'lived' Irishness fades, individual and collective cultural practices become ever more important in sustaining, protecting and perpetuating ethnic identities.[113] In Byron's view, the recurrent representation of the Famine as a mythic explanatory event is one symptom of this invented and essentializing 'diasporic culture' which is increasingly 'mass-produced, standardized, pre-packaged, one size fits all', where

> the anthropomorphic interpretation of the Famine, as the event that is popularly believe to have caused the Irish diaspora, has assumed mythic status and now informs most people's understandings of the 'immigrant experience' [...] It is an allegory that invites us to consider how something that does not exist except as a nominal abstraction and might never have existed in the other America beyond the first-generation big-city immigrant ghetto – an Irish-American *ethnie* – can be represented in our imagination [...] That the arresting imagery of this picture is the very opposite of social and historical reality, and stands in a dialectical relationship to it, adds to its power to command our attention.[114]

Though much of their fieldwork predates the revival of interest in Famine memory in the late 1990s, Waters and Byron's studies correctly anticipate how U.S. Famine commemorations would coalesce a form of cultural politics emphasizing ethnic solidarities and shared symbolic references – and forecast the emergence of Famine ancestral visualizations as a means of reaffirming group identities and strengthening networks of affiliation.

The shared characteristics of more than two dozen U.S. community Famine monuments constructed over the past fifteen years provide evidence of how a standardized vocabulary and iconography of Famine remembrance has been grafted onto local sites in increasingly paradigmatic ways – and the ascendance of Irish American genealogy as both cultural practice and epistemology. The social infrastructure supporting Famine memorial projects in the U.S. has a wider base than in any other country due to the strength and diversity of Irish voluntary organizations, which have since the nineteenth century deeply influenced orthodox notions of Irish American identity and emigrant experience. Many of these associations (such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Friendly Sons of St. Patrick), united by a dedication to mutual aid and a passion for Irish heritage and personal genealogy, enthusiastically embraced the Famine

113 Such conclusions bear distinct echoes of Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieux de mémoire* arising as substitutes for active memory: Nora, 'Between memory and history,' 11–12.

114 Byron, *Irish America*, 294–5.

anniversary as an opportunity to commemorate their ancestors' experience and were fundamental in the establishment of commemorative committees. The bonds of connection uniting diverse U.S. memorial committees were remarkably close and personal in nature: in interviewing dozens of individuals involved with projects across several states, it became clear that awareness of other groups' memorial work was extremely high, and online networks were heavily utilized by groups seeking (or poaching) design ideas and inscriptions, soliciting donations and publicizing completed projects. Irish American committee leaders, many of whom travelled to major Famine sites in Ireland in preparation for their own commemorations, often displayed in-depth of knowledge of obscure memorials and sites located in Ireland or particular attachments to Irish regions related to personal genealogies and family histories.

The representational choices and themes adopted for U.S. community Famine memorials have overwhelmingly favoured the visualization of emigration, genealogical links and reification of the real or imagined Irish ancestor. Textual and symbolic declarations of genealogical ties have been directly inscribed onto the physical form of the memorials, including the extensive recording of family names, the insertion of stone elements from coastal points of departure or resonance like Cobh, the Cliffs of Moher and Connemara, and frequent reference in inscriptions to ancestral experience and the duty of remembrance borne by descendants. Funding for many projects derived from the sale of physical space enabling participants to commemorate their own personal genealogy via dedication stones or plaques. Formally, the literal recreation of genealogy in the shape of bronze figural family groups dominates many memorial sites presenting a simulated Irish ancestor(s) usually based on nineteenth-century engraved prototypes.[115]

Slippage is common between the categories of 'Irish immigrant' and 'Famine immigrant', and claims of descent from Famine immigrants form a powerful emotional image striking close to the core of an oft-expressed form of Irish American identity, although such identifications need not have a factual basis to be persuasive.[116] As Terry Golway has remarked:

115 Examples include Cambridge, MA (1997); Boston, MA (1998); Oak Forest, IL (1999); Ardsley, NY (2001); Philadelphia, PA (2003); and Providence, RI (2007).

116 Byron makes this point forcefully in his analysis: 'Despite the common perception that today's generations of people of Irish ancestry are 'the children of the Famine', there has been so much generational mixing over the last 150 years that it is questionable how many people having some fifth-generation ancestry are even preponderantly the descendants of Famine immigrants' (Byron, *Irish America*, 145).

> We are Famine immigrants, the sons and daughters of outcasts [...] There is a slight problem with all of this, one we acknowledge to ourselves from time to time. We don't actually know if the Golways were Famine immigrants. We've traced the line to the 1880s or so, but there the paperwork fails us, and truth be told, we simply haven't had time to press the issue. Somebody in the family, a distant cousin perhaps, once told us that we are the descendants of Famine immigrants, and that's all the proof we need. But the reality is, we're just making it up [...] So, fine, the Golways are Famine immigrants. The question is why we would wear such a designation as a badge of honour.[117]

It is clear that for many Irish Americans, commemorating the Famine past offered a deeply felt opportunity to restore dignity to marginalized victims of a massive human tragedy – and contained the transformative potential for self-knowledge, communion with others of similar background, and a profound means of connecting with ancestral experience. The positivist language of much Famine commemoration – giving voice to the voiceless, breaking silence, safeguarding memory, educating subsequent generations, passing on a heritage – promoted affirmative identifications with Irish ancestry and characterized commemoration as a moral and ethical obligation. Monument-making constitutes a form of community-building, and commemoration a moment of collective reckoning, but, like other forms of bounded social practice, their politics and exclusions must remain open to investigation:

> Myths fill a need. That need should not be ridiculed or disparaged. But we might question why some myths take the form they do, and wonder why they have done so, and in whose political and economic interest it is to create or perpetuate certain kinds of stories.[118]

In the section that follows, a review of two U.S. community Famine monuments (and references to others) constructed since 1995 reveals the pervasive influence of genealogical consciousness, the mechanisms of its imaging and the social networks which have facilitated its expression in public space.

117 Terry Golway, 'Famine Roots.' In *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine*, ed. Tom Hayden (Boulder/Dublin: Roberts Rinehart Publishers/Wolfhound Press, 1997), 227–40.

118 Byron, *Irish America*, 295.

Buffalo

The second-largest city in New York State, the city of Buffalo in Western New York functioned as a major hub of mid-nineteenth-century Irish immigration with its location of strategic importance along the U.S./Canadian border and the Erie Canal, and as the key transportation link for Mid-Western grain and machinery shipments to the East coast and Europe. As stopping-off point for migrants travelling west after their trans-Atlantic voyage, or gateway for those who availed of cheaper fares to Canada and crossed by foot over the unregulated border into the U.S., Buffalo became the permanent home to a sizeable Irish community who stayed rather than passed through.[119] Although Buffalo's economic fortunes have precipitously declined since the mid-twentieth century, the Irish remain one of the strongest historical ethnic communities (in addition to substantial Italian, German and Polish populations) evidenced by the many local Irish cultural groups, fraternal and community organizations, and local businesses.

Inspired by Mary Robinson's 1994 visit to the U.S. and Canada and her subsequent address on Famine memory and diaspora to the Houses of the Oireachtas in 1995, the Western New York Irish Famine Commemoration Committee formed in 1995 with a membership drawn from eighteen local Irish community groups.[120] The committee intended to erect a monument within two years in time for the 150th anniversary, successfully soliciting donations of $100 each from thirty-five Irish organizations to launch the project. In August 1997 the Western New York Irish Famine Memorial was unveiled at the Erie Basin Marina at a total cost of approximately $150,000 (Fig. 5.14). The relatively rapid realization of the monument owed much to the close cooperation between local Irish groups and to a strong relationship established between the committee and Cork City.[121] Chairman Laurence Shine (a first generation immigrant from Dublin) led the group in making contact with officials from Cork, culminating in a visit by a Buffalo delegation to Ireland to visit various Famine sites and discuss the possibility of utilizing stone from Co. Cork in the monument's construction. In

119 William Jenkins, 'Deconstructing Diasporas: Networks and Identities among the Irish in Buffalo and Toronto, 1870-1910.' In *Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities since 1750*, ed. Enda Delaney and Donald M. MacRaild (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 210–49.

120 Details of the monument's development (and subsequent quotes) derived from interview with Laurence Shine, Mike Flynn, and Charles Treanor (Members of Western New York Famine Commemoration Committee), 19 June 2005.

121 From 1995 to 1997 three successive Lord Mayors of Cork also made appearances to assist with local fundraisers, and a civic delegation attended the Buffalo monument's dedication ceremony.

Shine's view, Cork City's influence (along with the liberal-minded Catholic leadership in Buffalo) was as ideologically useful as it was practical:

> I would have to say, it's my belief anyway, we avoided all the pitfalls of the local organizations, their ideas of what the thing would be, with the help of the Church and Cork City. Because with their influence we could get rid of militaristic flags, we could get rid of people parading in Civil War uniforms up the middle of the cathedral locally, and all of these strange things that go on when they begin commemorating here [...] to me Famine commemoration also meant reminding Irish Americans and other Americans that there is another way of thinking about it.

The group's visit to Cork cemented the decision to utilize stones from Penrose Quay (then being dismantled) in the construction of the monument; visits to standing stones at Drombeg in Cork, Lough Gur in Limerick and the Famine cemetery of Abbeystrewery in Skibbereen further reinforced for members the idea of commemorating the Famine through the image of a 'field of stones'.

After considering various sites, a waterfront location near downtown Buffalo was selected following negotiations with the City of Buffalo. Committee members remarked on the final appropriateness of locating the memorial near a waterway as suggestive of Buffalo's role as a port of passage and arrival, but more prosaically it also joined a park landscape already populated with local war memorials to World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Though some members had initially argued for a Celtic cross memorial in the early stages of its conception, the committee eventually rejected concepts inspired by nineteenth-century symbols and opted for a form visually compelling yet abstract in its politics: 'We decided that the starkest thing would be the most eloquent for the victims of the Famine.'[122] Designed by architect/designer Rob Ferguson in conjunction with the committee, the memorial comprises a 12ft 'standing stone' constructed from Carraroe (Co. Galway) granite donated by the quarry of Mairtin O Bhreathnach, resting on a rectangular base with inscription, surrounded by an empty circular well etched with verses contributed by Buffalo poet Tim Daly. Spiralling out

122 This decision had a practical as well as aesthetic dimension: at least two other proposed U.S. Irish Famine cross memorials (in Rochester and Olean, NY) have been rejected by civic officials due to policies discouraging the erection of religious symbols in public space. The relative paucity of Celtic cross monuments in the U.S. (as opposed to Canada) is likely due to similar restrictions, especially given the enduring popularity of the Celtic cross as a major symbol of Irish heritage in the U.S. (especially for the AOH, sponsor of many monuments).

Figure 5.14 *The Western New York Irish Famine Memorial*,
Rob Ferguson, Buffalo, New York (1997)
Western Irish New York Famine Commemoration Committee

from the central vertical stone are a bisected semi-circle split into four blank segments[123] and more than 800 paving slabs, featuring messages and names as contributed by sponsors. The paved area of names is ringed by thirty-two limestone blocks from Penrose Quay representing the thirty-two counties of Ireland. The memorial is approached via a walkway dotted with four bronze interpretative panels mounted on stone blocks which detail aspects of the memorial's site, design, sponsorship and a brief historical account of the Famine.

The multiple varieties and uses of stone in the monument embrace a spectrum of significations: stone as totemic (the central standing stone), relic (the re-used Cork quaystones), receptive (as surface for inscriptions), and pragmatic (in paving walkways and mounting bronze panels). Yet although the memorial's primary image (the field of stones) relies on a type of abstraction atypical of Famine monuments, its forms are not couched in minimalist ambiguity: each component of the monument carries direct symbolic associations (many explained in the accompanying plaques) and textual inscriptions. The position of the central stone was calculated to align with Cork City and its off-centre position intended to represent the displacement of Famine emigrants and the diaspora. For Shine, the standing stone and 'well of silence' formed expressive symbols of both place-making and the current generation's break with the legacy of Famine 'silence':

> To me it's a marker. Wherever you go, you have to have a sign that you were there […] the standing stone seemed to guarantee that it would traverse time, that it wouldn't just be time-specific, that it would always be here – a continuity with something not dating back to the Famine itself, or to 1601, or to 1171, or to the introduction of Christianity into Ireland, but beyond that, reaching back into the very landscape itself.[124]

> *An tslí as imigh tú*, the way by which you went. This signpost and landmark, this stone monument sent from Ireland, marks the way by which we went […] Like the ancient, eloquently silent standing stones of Ireland, which invariably stand in or by a spring, this granite signpost emerges from a well of silence and so breaks that silence.[125]

123 These segments were intended to feature the names of the four provinces, but this was not realized.

124 Interview, Laurence Shine (2005).

125 Text from the speech given by Laurence Shine during the memorial's rededication ceremony on 28 August, copy provided by Shine.

As evidently 'monumental' forms, megalithic structures have long inspired in viewers a sense of grandeur, timelessness and the sacralization of space, whether revered (somewhat mistakenly) as romanticized 'Celtic' forms[126] or translated by First and Second World War commemorations seeking apolitical yet sacrosanct iconography.[127] In her review of Buffalo's memorial, however, Kathleen O'Brien contends that this retreat into familiar symbolic territory impedes an engagement with the darker, diverse specifics of Famine memory:

> The distant chronological projections of early Irish stone sites on to the nineteenth-century famine, assumes the vagueness of unwritten histories and evades the documents and narratives of Irish diversity in the 1840s, thus obscuring what the famine commemoration purports to remember. Such stones suggest vague projection of pre-British Gaelic spirituality and mythologies of heroic transcendence on to famine issues, subtly bypassing other more difficult images.[128]

While she critiques this iconography as reinforcing a 'genealogy of disparity' in the effort to create links across both time and the diaspora, from another perspective continuity *has* been achieved between commemorationists of the nineteenth century and the twentieth, in perpetuating the predilection for layering new narratives onto ancient monumental forms. In this sense the adoption of megaliths for Famine commemorative purposes is analogous to the translation of figurative nineteenth-century illustrations into contemporary bronze: romanticized and deeply embedded in the history of the visual picturesque, these images present an understanding of Famine that reaffirms genealogical authenticity and cultural continuity, and recasts ephemeral traces of the past into a monumental and nostalgic present.[129]

126 Although standing stones and other megaliths have acquired many shades of associated symbolism from the Middle Ages through to today, their construction in fact predates the Celts by millennia; however, they are often popularly understood as 'Celtic' symbols.

127 Sarah Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering: Death, Bereavement and the First World War.' *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 7, no. 1 (1997): 105–21. The appeal of stone imagery also builds upon the wide-ranging tradition of the 'cairn', the placing of massed stones on a grave or site as a gesture of respect for the dead – a resonance utilized commonly for many recent Holocaust commemorations, including Jochen Gerz's *2,146 Stones – Monument Against Racism* (1991), the *Valley of the Communities* in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem (1983-93), and Duszenko and Haupt's *Treblinka Memorial* (1964).

128 Kathleen O'Brien, 'Montréal and Buffalo: Famine Memory in Metamorphosis.' Études Irlandaises 28.2 (2003): 99–118.

129 The associative overlap of the megalith, nineteenth-century illustration, and 'Celtic'

Buffalo's placement of its standing stone within layers of poetic allusion and a sun-centric plaza design was likely the first major U.S. recreation of a megalithic experience in the service of Famine memory;[130] however, subsequent projects (most notably the *Irish Hunger Memorial* in Battery Park City, New York, discussed in Chapter 6) have also simulated the passageways of court tombs or replicated the central image of the standing stone.[131] Indeed, Buffalo's design concept had a direct impact on two later Famine memorials (in Olean, New York and Irish Hills, Michigan) both of which received leftover Cork quaystones from the Buffalo project, and centralized these humble stones as the centrepiece of their own commemorative monuments. In the absence of a site or landscape with Famine significance, megalithic reproductions implant a 'piece' of Ireland into local places, a powerfully appealing metaphor for individuals who similarly view their ancestors as 'displaced' persons and seek material connection with an estranged history.[132]

The inscription in Irish at the base of the standing stone (within the 'well of silence') bears a verse from Luke 19:40, '*má thochduid so, go néighfidh na clocha féin*' ('If these were to be silent, the very stones would cry out'), found in an 1830 Irish Bible from Niagara Falls by local historian Ed Patton and selected for its unusual and evocative use of the verb *néighfidh*, traditionally used to describe the sound of seagulls' cries and aligned with the sound of keening, an rural Irish funeral practice of lamenting the dead that largely died out during the Famine years. The text reinforces allusions to the memorial's irruption of Famine 'silence'; its use of the Irish language (with the translation appearing several feet away on an interpretative panel) and a Gaelicized script function like the standing stone itself, alluding to a sense of strangeness and antiquity, privileging poetic evocation over historical didacticism.

If genealogical links with Irish Famine ancestors are here more implicitly than explicitly rendered through use of stone symbols over figuration, this connection becomes more pronounced as one radiates outwards from the central stone. Local poet Tim Daly's words incised along the lip of the well

high cross symbol is perhaps most fully embodied by the Cleveland, OH monument (2000), which combines all three of these images.

130 The inauguration of Buffalo's monument included re-enactment of a '*deiseal*' ceremony, where the monument was 'sanctified' by circling it in a sunwise direction.

131 In addition to the New York project (2002), other examples include monuments in Keansburg, NY (1997), Phoenix, AZ (1999) Olean, NY (2000), Cleveland, OH (2000), and Irish Hills, MI (2004). Canadian examples include Ste-Agathe de Lotbinière, Québec (2000) and Moncton, New Brunswick (2000).

132 The monument in Irish Hills, MI also features reliquaries containing a stone from each of the thirty-two Irish counties buried beneath paving stones marked by county names; the major monument in Battery Park City, NY (discussed in Chapter 6) bears a similar 'scattering' of county stones across its landscape.

declare 'Our hearts are with them in the Earth, and they with us in our hearts. Now we, together, live forever. We are the harvest of the blight, let us not fail our seed.' Buffalo's Irish community, the 'harvest of the blight', is here formally materialized through hundreds of engraved dedicatory paving stones encircling the well and stone: 'The circular memorial field, filled with names of Famine victims, those who survived, their descendants and friends symbolically ends "The Great Silence."'[133]

As with many diasporic memorial projects, funding for the monument derived from the sale of these spaces, at $150 for small slabs and $1,000 for privileged positions in front of the 'county' quay stones.[134] Family names, Irish ancestors, localities and other inscriptions were incised into the stones as per donor request, although Shine and other committee members emphasized that overtly political or controversial messages were not entertained.[135] The presence of naming stones asserts local and personal ownership of the space, yet perhaps indicates a stronger presence of remembering subject than object of veneration. With the tradition of Famine memory repeatedly described as 'silent', the Famine immigrant is only made present through the voice of the descendant: who these Famine immigrants actually were, and the diverse shades of their individual experiences, remains elusive. As many stones bear the words 'in memory of' followed by an individual or family name, it is often unclear whether inscriptions credit Famine ancestors or more recent descendants, as multiple generations are collapsed into a single field of memory. With the massing of such stones personal genealogy competes for textual primacy with the bronze interpretative panels (the only other major textual component of the memorial), and the visible force of these individual declarations nearly overwhelms the poetic evocations of Famine remembrance sought by the memorial's designers. Nevertheless, the Buffalo monument offers an intriguing example of the layering of collective and individual witness to Famine memory, the diasporic investment of Famine commemorative values into Irish artefactual residues, and ultimately how local commemorations may be plugged into a wider commemorative frame of reference, shifting between local, diasporic and global signifiers at will.

133 From the bronze interpretative panel. According to the committee approximately one-eighth of the stones were also purposely left blank, symbolizing Famine victims erased or forgotten.

134 In interview committee members emphasized that the scale of the project was controlled to allow for complete community ownership (as opposed to requiring appeals to external funding agencies.)

135 Shine avowed that 'we tried very hard to avoid any kind of sectarianism […] it was a unifying enterprise.'

Westchester County

As with Buffalo, the *Westchester County Great Hunger Memorial* (2001, Fig. 5.15) was a sophisticated, high-concept local Famine monument developed to acknowledge the heritage of its resident Irish American community, observe the Famine anniversary and raise awareness of contemporary hunger.[136] Here most similarities end: situated within one of the most affluent suburban areas in the United States (bordering the island of Manhattan to the north) with a budget at the top end of the scale amongst community commemorations, the Westchester County monument adopts as its central image a bronze emigrant family group and abbreviated cottage structure, and the community solidarities typically undergirding such commemorative efforts imploded in dramatic fashion with the emergence of rival factions within its committee.

The project was originally initiated by Eleanor McDonald, a second-generation Irish American active in numerous Irish voluntary associations, who founded The Great Hunger Foundation in 1994 and incorporated it in 1995, with the mission 'to remember our ancestors and the terrible suffering they endured and to alleviate hunger, to the best of our ability, in our time.'[137] In addition to local food drives and scholarship competitions aimed at encouraging interest in the history of nineteenth-century Ireland, members of the foundation proposed a Famine memorial to local legislator Louis A. Mosiello in 1995; the project gained support of county officials, and in 1996 the project was offered V.E. Macy Park in Ardsley as a site.[138]

Out of the Great Hunger Foundation grew the Great Hunger Memorial Committee, tasked with the majority of fundraising responsibilities and coordinating a competition for the design. Led by local businessman and philanthropist James J. Houlihan, the committee succeeded in raising over $1.2 million for the project (including approximately $600,000 in cash and in-kind donations), towards the eventual $635,000 cost of the monument.[139] Funding derived largely from private individual donations, including a $25,000 seed gift from Houlihan, in addition to approximately $100,000 in public grants from Westchester County and the state of New York.[140] An

136 Twelve per cent of Westchester County residents claim Irish ancestry, according to the 2010 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

137 http://www.thegreathungerfoundation.org (now inactive). Information on the foundation and the early stages of the memorial's development derived from its website, unveiling programme and reports in *The New York Times* and local media.

138 Named after Westchester's superintendent of the poor in the 1930s, V.E. Macy Park was renamed the 'Great Hunger Memorial Park' in 2004 and the memorial was rededicated.

139 This cost included the artist's fee of $250,000 for creating and producing the memorial sculptures. Leftover funds were originally earmarked for charities addressing local hunger and homelessness.

140 Gen Hyacinthe, 'Building Communities with the arts.' *The Westchester County Business*

Figure 5.15
Westchester County Great Hunger Memorial, Eamonn O'Doherty, Ardsley, New York (2001)
Great Hunger Foundation & Memorial Committee

open competition was held in 1999 to choose a design, and Irish sculptor Eamonn O'Doherty was awarded the commission; by that time O'Doherty had already completed two other Famine memorials in Enniskillen and Liverpool, in addition to his earlier *Emigrants* sculpture (1990) located in Derry.[141]

Following the monument's unveiling in June 2001 members of the memorial committee received an unexpected letter from the Great Hunger Foundation informing them that the committee was dissolved, and surplus funds of approximately $300,000 would be reverting back to the foundation. A lawsuit subsequently filed by Houlihan and the committee against the foundation sought to regain control of the funds, and relations between the two camps swiftly became acrimonious.[142] Bitterness over the assignation of credit for the memorial project and McDonald's attempt to reassert control over the organization fuelled much of the conflict. According to McDonald and the foundation, the realization of the memorial meant the committee served no further purpose. Houlihan, who had been responsible for raising nearly the entire amount for the memorial, disagreed and expressed his concern that the money was being inappropriately used to swell the coffers of the foundation, which had been largely overshadowed by the committee's work. The squabble between the parties escalated and eventually landed the dispute in the New York State Supreme Court; the lawsuit was settled out of court in August 2003.[143]

The damage done to the reputation of the project was voiced by fundraiser John R. McCarthy in a report published in *The New York Times*:

> I think it's a black eye to the Irish-American community [...] We'd written a phenomenal book with the effort around the Great Hunger Memorial, but the last chapter stinks. The members of the foundation, who I didn't even know existed until March, have come in and undermined our efforts, and now we don't get any say where the money will go. It's crazy.[144]

Journal, 4 January 1999; Thomas Staudter, 'After 7 Years of Planning, Memorial to Irish Famine is Ready.' *The New York Times*, 24 June 2001.

141 Details of the design competition, construction of the monument and subsequent disputes were provided in interview with O'Doherty (2006) and from media coverage of the controversy.

142 Thomas Staudter, 'Dispute Overshadows Hunger Sculpture.' *The New York Times*, 2 September 2001; Thomas Staudter, 'Dispute on Hunger Sculpture Lingers.' *The New York Times*, 3 February 2002.

143 Reported details of the settlement indicate that the remaining funds were distributed to local charities: Len Maniace, 'Suit over Irish Famine Memorial Settled.' *The Journal News* (Lower Hudson Valley, NY), 17 September 2003.

144 Staudter, 'Dispute Overshadows Hunger Sculpture.'

Sculptor Eamonn O'Doherty agreed, citing his legal fight to be awarded the remaining portion of his fees and the stereotype of the 'shanty Irish fighting amongst themselves' resurfacing to tarnish the image of those involved.[145] The irony of a project ostensibly about remembering the forgotten and socially marginalized, splintering into a row over receiving credit and asserting commemorative control amongst Westchester's Irish elite, was not lost on participants or observers of the conflict. Local public monuments are typically enabled by close networks of association and appeals to community solidarity, in essence constituting a form of materialized social capital. However, while such bonds of connection facilitate the successful realization of monuments, they bear potential for conflict as well as cohesion. That public monuments also work as a means of enhancing the social reputation and prestige of their creators partially underlies the compulsion to record donor and committee names at memorial sites (in Westchester four separate bronze plaques were needed to accommodate all the names of supporters), though such gestures have not been welcomed in all cultural contexts.[146] Within the diaspora the recording of donor names on monument plaques functions as an inscriptive, not merely descriptive act: conferring cultural legitimacy on the agents of commemoration, reaffirming genealogical descent and relationship with distant Famine ancestors, as well as signifying social position and ethnic belonging.

As Catherine Nash has noted, genealogical pursuits 'involve ethnic choices, imaginative identifications, and cultural politics'[147] – a confluence of forces further materialized at the site of U.S. Famine monuments via the visual representation of family groups. The mapping of the Famine's devastation against the family unit is of course a representational trope in active use since the nineteenth century, but in the diaspora the casting of Famine families in bronze pointedly embodies concepts of 'ownership, possession, and inheritance' that feature so strongly within contemporary discourses and practices of Irish American genealogy.[148] In O'Doherty's design for Westchester, a bronze family group of six stand stoically with a small pile of their possessions to one side and a pair of stone gables behind, alluding to the home they are leaving or the remnants of one that has been destroyed. The two parents and younger children's forward movement is implied by the swell of the women's skirts rather than any deliberate motion, whilst one older boy to the rear breaks the symmetry of the group: arms

145 Interview, Eamonn O'Doherty (2006).

146 In Ireland the practice of donor recognition on Famine commemorations is fairly rare, and has occasioned harsh criticism when it has appeared, as in the case of Dublin's *Famine* monument (see Chapter 6).

147 Nash, *Of Irish Descent*, 45.

148 Nash, *Of Irish Descent*, 19

crossed over thin shoulders, he glances back as if fixing the place within his memory. His gaze brings our view back towards a bronze overturned creel of potatoes, which upon closer inspection are metamorphosing into human skulls.[149]

With the primary figures measuring approximately 9ft tall, their monumental scale and unity as a group suggest solidarity and the endurance of the familial relationship in the face of tragic circumstance. The subtle modulation of the figures' impassive facial expressions allows for multiple readings of their emotional state, and the installation of the figures at ground level invites viewer approach and tactile response. In conversation about the piece O'Doherty described his interest in conveying the drama of displacement, creating 'a piece of theatre' aimed at connecting with the general public (as opposed to appeasing art critics), though adding, 'Melodrama doesn't work in theatre – and it doesn't work in art,' citing the Boston Famine Memorial[150] as an example of emotional 'overkill'. In essence, the Westchester monument combines two of O'Doherty's previous Famine/emigration-related works: the twin gables from his non-figurative memorial in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh (1996), and the family group pulled in opposing directions which defines his *Emigrants* sculpture in Derry (1990). Here O'Doherty heightens the figurative tension of the family group in Westchester and its theatrical engagement with the viewer, enlarging the figures and placing them within a mise-en-scène of eviction/departure, though perhaps the weakest element of the memorial is the addition of the overturned creel, with the unnecessarily literal skull-potatoes bordering on kitsch.

Of all the figural sculptures created for the Famine's commemoration, these are amongst the most successfully finished and well-executed, as O'Doherty's textured modelling of the bronze reinforces the figures' physicality and stylized realism, and juxtaposes coarseness of surface with their fragile extended proportions. Though it may be, as O'Doherty himself has said, 'slightly corny' and a simulation of sorts, the work manages to evoke some sense of the desolation of Famine and emigration without recourse to ham-fisted Irish stereotypes, and presents an original artistic reinvention of nineteenth-century visual tropes (the cottage, the displaced family group, emaciated bodies) without extreme sensationalization. Nevertheless, the Westchester monument remains grounded in an empathetical strategy common to nearly all U.S. memorials – commanding an emotional and visceral communion with the physical presence of the imagined Famine

149 According to O'Doherty, the creel/skull image was inspired by Seamus Heaney's poem 'At a Potato Digging'.

150 See Chapter 6.

ancestor – echoed and amplified in particular by Famine commemorative projects in Boston and Philadelphia (as discussed in Chapter 6). Community memorials in Ireland, by contrast, are located in physical spaces so heavily imbued with presence (abandoned workhouses, Famine graveyards) that to attempt a simulated encounter with the Famine sufferer would seem hopelessly trite, even offensive. If local monuments in Ireland are more often concerned with directing attention to painful and historically obscured experience, in the U.S. they are about recreating an experience whose traces are largely invisible, and which must often receive many additional glosses of emotion or interpretation to achieve relevance and visibility.

Yet what is implied in many memorials' presentation of the Famine ancestor is that such an individual can be unproblematically projected into the present. The genealogical trajectory of Famine emigrant to 1990s American descendant foregrounded by such monuments, and the amplification of Irishness in public space enabled by the Famine's anniversary, can be understood as a resounding (if restless) reassertion of Terry Golway's claim '*We* are Famine immigrants.' Perhaps such entrenched orthodoxies of Famine ancestral representation – and their blurring of self and subject – should compel us to take David Lowenthal's scepticism to heart:

> However much we know *about* the past, we can never really know *how* it was for those who lived back then. This is what historians now tell us. But how many really share their doubts? I suspect few take historians' cautions to heart; so alien a past is too hard to bear, especially when we treasure it as our own possession. The precursors we conjure up continue to seem folk much like ourselves.[151]

Conclusion

What does the Famine mean to those Irish Americans, Canadians and Britons who chose to commemorate its anniversary in their local communities? The tendency of historians to focus on prominent public artworks in major cities usually omits these humbler narratives, yet individually and in the aggregate, these local monuments reveal the ongoing fierce custodianship of Famine memory across the many geographies of diaspora. For some, the Famine anniversary offered an opportunity to assert the historic (and contemporary) presence of the Irish in local communities. For others, it allowed for connection to a compelling version of ethnic identity centred on tragedy, loss and a cathartic encounter with memory. The occasion of

151 Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, xiv–xv.

the anniversary further encouraged social networks to coalesce around a foundational historical event with powerful emotional resonance, and affirm their own position within local communities as guardians of Irish heritage and narratives of Irish identity. The community monuments reviewed in this chapter tend to have a limited degree of openness to or interest for the towns in which they exist – they are the work and expression of small groups with a particular agenda, often operating below the radar of wider civic awareness – yet these same groups have influentially shaped what 'being Irish' means outside of Ireland, and their leveraging of the commemorations indicates the deep value still invested in Famine memory as a fluid metaphor of belonging.

What does the future hold for these memorials? Rather than functioning as finite acknowledgments of an anniversary (as was often the case in the Republic, where some are now falling into disrepair and most committees have disbanded), most diasporic monuments have continued as focal points for ceremony and attention from the groups responsible for their construction. The strength of social ties binding members of Irish ethnic organizations together seems likely to sustain many of these projects well into the future; committees interviewed expressed a strong sense of ownership over their projects, often orchestrating rededication ceremonies or integrating completed memorials into related local heritage networks and initiatives in an effort to prolong their visibility.

In almost every commemorative example the 'Irish community' is cited as if a monolithic and tangible entity, though the notion of such cohesion is inevitably an illusion, and the actual diversity of influence and circumstance surrounding their processes of development (if not their widely similar physical forms) contradicts such a reading. The anxieties underlying some of these efforts – fears over a declining solidarity in the Irish community, or the competition with other ethnic groups for public space and recognition – are palpable.[152] The paucity of imaginative or artist-led community monuments to the Irish Famine seems tied to this tendency towards narrative conservatism and predisposition to accepted forms of representation. For the most part, diasporic Famine memorials have not sought to question received Famine narratives or inspire self-reflexive contemplation beyond emotional or genealogical affiliation; accordingly, the employment of visual artists for commemorative monuments is, with a few exceptions, done in a purely operational capacity, if at all. Art,

152 The author Sean Kenny has expressed such sentiments more crudely: 'Studies of the Famine are making their way onto the American school curriculum. Now, for the first time since they were obliged to blend in, the Irish will stand out again, just as blacks, Jews, Hispanics and Chinese do.' Kenny, 'A Nightmare Revisited,' 190.

therefore, is not usually an objective of such commemorations – and indeed the tendency of artworks to question rather than celebrate, provoke rather than praise, may render such an intent wholly incompatible with the commemorative impulse.

The relative similarity of themes and imagery adopted for local diasporic monuments indicates that a certain visual orthodoxy, transnational in scope, has taken hold with respect to the memorialization of the Famine. Whether editing and refashioning traditional monumental forms like the high cross, inventing new narratives for recreated or imported 'megalithic' Irish stones, or indulging in fictive melodrama through bronze figurative groups, diasporic monuments reveal a surprising continuity with nineteenth-century methods of visualizing the Famine. In substituting the heroic for the ugly, optimism for despair, sentimentality for horror – they equally manifest a shared logic of proximate witnessing, romantic ethnic evocation and re-inscription of painful experience in affirmative and redemptive iconography. As commemorative groups have aspired to recreate 'authentic' experiences of the Famine in the absence of tangible residues, they have devised solutions centred on authenticity of form: importing Irish Famine 'relics', adapting nineteenth-century visual material to suit twentieth-century expectations of suffering, or adopting iconography associated with more familiar commemorative moments (war, Holocaust remembrance, Irish nationalist commemoration, etc.). While many diasporic memorials do effectively engage with particulars of local Famine memory and present them creatively to new local audiences, an all-too-frequent overreliance on Famine tropes and standardized imagery brings to mind the concept of 'imagined memory' generated through exposure to archives and mass media and transformed as an equivalent to lived memory.[153] The hazards of such homogeneity bear due consideration:

> We are now in danger of losing all this richness of variety as understanding about 'Irish ethnicity' and 'the immigrant experience' settle into rigid, iconic shapes which canalize and constrain the way that Irish-Americanness is represented, authorizing – even sacralizing – some ideas and interpretations and condemning others as 'revisionism'. What has been said about life in the ghetto now informs how people can know themselves [...][154]

In Mary Robinson's speech on the diaspora that launched a flotilla of memorials, she made reference to the beneficial impact of technology in

153 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 166.
154 Byron, *Irish America*, 297.

uniting the diaspora, creating new connections across geographies and precipitating a diversified, not reduced conception of global Irish community. For better or worse, it would appear that the response of diasporic commemorative communities has not yet accorded with such aspirations; it remains to be seen whether future examples will arise to challenge this paradigm.

6
Major Famine Memorials

Monuments to the Irish Famine can be found in communities across three continents; while the majority remain relatively unseen, unknown affairs, a small proportion has attained widespread recognition and attention. These memorials are the products of sustained, well-funded, and organized commemorative efforts, usually supported by an infrastructure of official and/or national bodies, and present an embodiment of Famine memory explicitly intended for wider viewership. As a consequence, many bear the scars of protracted civic negotiation and politicized appropriation, of artistic vision and compromise, and of struggles between competing versions of Irish history and identity. They are, in every sense, 'monumental' memorials: grand in conception and execution, and tied to an acute sense of historical self-consciousness in their constructions of the past for present consumption. All significant public art commissions (several exceeding €1 million in cost) these works constitute some of the most visible public engagements with Famine memory, and in most cases have defined the careers of the artists charged with their execution. The political agency of their construction and the pressures evinced through patronage have made an indelible impact on their formal approaches and subsequent public reception, and a contrast and comparison between them reiterates the congruencies and divergences of national contexts of remembrance as outlined in previous chapters.

The first four monuments (in Dublin, Boston, Murrisk, Co. Mayo, and Philadelphia) are conservative (even regressive) in their aesthetic design. Dublin's *Famine* (1997) and Boston's *Irish Famine Memorial* (1998) revisit the oft-visualized dramatic moment of departure and arrival, yet both have been dogged by controversies related to their sponsorship and the mechanics of their making. Murrisk's *National Famine Memorial* (1997) and Philadelphia's *Irish Memorial* (2003) centre on the emblematic image of the coffin ship and Atlantic passage, although to different extremes: in Mayo, expressionistic horror steeped in the Irish modernist tradition; in Philadelphia, aggressive sentimentalism and racial fantasy. The final pair of memorials (in Sydney

and New York) is exemplary for unusual aesthetic approaches drawn from international models of the counter-monumental and other postmodern and conceptual visual strategies. Sydney's *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine* (1999) is most exceptional as the only memorial dedicated to the experience of emigrant women, namely that of 4,000 orphan girls shipped from Ireland to Australia between 1848 and 1850. At the heart of its design is an understated architectural exploration of memory and loss, continuity and transition, appended on to the grounds of Hyde Park Barracks (itself an important symbol of Australia's convict heritage). In New York City, the *Irish Hunger Memorial* (2002) transplants a Famine-era cottage from Mayo and presents a literal reconstruction of a quarter acre of Irish landscape amongst Manhattan's skyscrapers. Conceived as an elaborate theatre of memory where contingency is elevated over historicity, principles of monumentality are inverted yet everywhere invoked: in the shadow of Ellis Island, romantic reimaginings of an idyllic Ireland coexist with the implausibility of its authenticity. Finally, any doubt that the currency of Famine memory continues unabated into the present may be dispelled by the example of the two major memorials recently unveiled in Toronto (2008) and Providence, Rhode Island (2007). Both are Famine sequels of sorts by artists already known for their commemorative work (Rowan Gillespie, sculptor of the Dublin monument and Robert Shure, sculptor of Boston's), and their artistic evolution (or otherwise) is instructive of how the binary of 'commemorative art' is fundamentally about the nature of the public sphere, and the relationship of 'knowing' history to the 'envisioning' of memory.

In grouping together in this final chapter accounts of six major Famine memorial projects, the danger of extracting these works from the broader landscape of Famine commemoration should be acknowledged, as well as the limitations wrought by pairing analyses across contrasting categories of 'traditional' and 'progressive' memorial aesthetics. Yet the extraordinary interconnectedness of these projects – their shared history of shortlisted artists, influence upon one another's designs, and points of iconographic and symbolic intersection, both with small-scale community commemorations and each other – resist any such reductive reading. Their individual crystallizations of Famine cultural memories, what they do and do not elect to represent, and their selected means of engagement (material, technological and ideological) have and will remain influential, as works commemorating the Famine continue to roll out of the foundries and into our public spaces of remembrance.

Dublin and Boston

Speaking to a gathering of the American Bar Association in 2000, Táinaiste Mary Harney remarked how history and geography had shaped a powerful bond between the United States and Ireland, a nation now as ever 'closer to Boston than Berlin'. In the summer of 1997 President Mary Robinson's schedule of commemorative engagements was testament to the value placed on such emigrant links, with the unveiling of Dublin's Famine monument in May, the *National Famine Memorial* in Mayo in July, and three days later the unveiling of the first Boston-area Famine monument in Cambridge, MA. Unfortunately for the Cambridge project, its status as Boston's Famine memorial was swiftly eclipsed by the launch of a more elaborate and loudly trumpeted multi-million dollar project in downtown Boston city centre, now widely advertised as the primary site of Irish Famine memory within the metropolis. Viewed together the two urban memorials of Dublin and Boston offer a striking series of parallels: both are situated in prominent city thoroughfares, were realized through the efforts of a single prominent businessperson or philanthropist in the area, adopt a bronze figural group as subject, and centre their representations around themes of suffering and departure. Yet, if the Boston and Dublin monuments have emerged as iconic images of Famine in their respective cities, each has encountered mixed receptions of their reliance on figurative strategies and positioning of Famine suffering for contemporary viewership.

Dublin's Famine memorial (Fig 6.1), located near the Custom House on Dublin's quays began life as a private work by sculptor Rowan Gillespie, subsequently purchased by Irish philanthropist Norma Smurfit. The sculpture was donated by Smurfit in 1997 to the Irish State and installed quickly over nine months with the assistance of the Dublin Docklands Authority and the Office of Public Works.[1] The sculpture group, entitled *Famine*, consists of six gaunt, larger-than-life-sized figures and a dog roughly modelled in bronze; though the image of Famine sufferers struggling towards the quayside strikes a vivid profile, they were in fact designed without a site in mind.[2] Indeed, as a consequence of the Docklands' rapid development in the late 1990s/early 2000s (the Development Authority was launched in 1997) the work now occupies a far more visible location than was the case at its unveiling.

Following the success of *Famine*, Gillespie gave up exhibition work to concentrate full-time on site-specific commissions. Unusually, he casts his

1 A small booklet was published to coincide with the unveiling: Rowan Gillespie, *Famine* (Dublin: Office of Public Works, 2007).

2 Interview with Rowan Gillespie (Artist), 9 August 2007.

Figure 6.1
Famine, Rowan Gillespie,
Dublin, Co Dublin (1997)
Commissioned by
Norma Smurfit

own sculptures in his studio's foundry; while this practice necessarily limits the scale at which he can work (hence the casting of *Famine* as six separate figures) it has proved no barrier to obtaining public commissions. His bronze figurative sculptures are a familiar sight across Ireland and especially Dublin, including *The Blackrock Dolmen* (Dublin, 1987), *WB Yeats* (Sligo, 1990), *Aspiration* (Dublin, 1995), and *Ripples of Ulysses* (Dublin, 2000). Primarily a figurative sculptor, Gillespie's commissions range stylistically from a polished decorative realism to variations on abstraction suggesting influence from a wide mix of modernist traditions, and demonstrate an affinity with narrative, allegorical and historical/literary subjects.

These three thematic strands coalesce in his *Famine* piece, influenced by the compositions of Auguste Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* (1889) and the early twentieth-century Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland's expressive, elongated figurative sculptures,[3] and executed with a roughness of finish unique amongst his large-scale work: 'The principle on the casting was that if there was a fault, I was just going to leave it there, so they're totally raw, there's absolutely no concession to prettiness at any stage.' [4] Though structured as a group, Gillespie's figures depart from the trope of the fractured, multi-generational family; they are conceived instead as a proportional snapshot of Irish emigrant age and gender layered against the alienation of the individual:

> They're not close together, they're sort of separated out to give the isolation of each person's story. It's not as if you've got a family leaving, there's no indication of whether there's a relationship between the people or not [...] Many people thought, well, why don't you have some more children to evoke more of the sort of feeling which people will naturally have towards a starving child, but in fact the proportions are correct, that there were very few children leaving the country.[5]

Aware of the parallels often drawn between the Holocaust and the Famine, Gillespie used a concentration camp photograph as the basis for the first female figure: 'But to me that didn't matter, the sculpture is simply called *Famine*, it is not called "The Great Famine", it is about the struggle to survive for people who haven't had food.'[6] The explicit construction of Famine as genocide, according to Gillespie, was consciously avoided in

3 Interview with Gillespie (2007).
4 Kay Sheehy, 'Programme 2: Rowan Gillespie's Famine Memorial: Rays of Light? Series.' (Radio broadcast), RTÉ Radio 1, 10 February 2005.
5 Sheehy, 'Rays of Light?'.
6 Sheehy, 'Rays of Light?'.

preference for the evocation of an 'emotional' rather than 'political' viewer response:

> My first reaction was to be driven by anger, and almost go down the genocide road, that this was an act of genocide. And it was my brother who, when I in a moment compared it to the Holocaust [...] pulled me in and said 'no, no, just don't get that wrong. It's a completely different thing that was happening. There might have been neglect, but genocide is too big a word to put on it.' And I became aware that the only way to handle a theme like this was to withdraw from any political comment, not to get involved in that side of it [...] The importance to me was to just show a group of people as they might have looked, so that people can have completely their own emotional reaction.[7]

Other figures drew more directly from Gillespie's personal experience: the tall male figure assumes the face of his grandfather, a 'stern' man who terrified Gillespie as a child, and the woman to the rear is based on Gillespie's older sister Lorraine who died tragically at age twenty-four after struggling with drug addiction and anorexia. The male figure with a child draped over his shoulders derives from a Famine account from Connemara describing a father's desperate journey to find food for his child, a story Gillespie related to his personal experience as father to a daughter suffering from anorexia: 'I went through the experience of actually carrying this bundle up to her room, limp like a dead child. There is no horror in my life worse than that.'[8] The cowering dog to the rear of the group lends a sinister element to the work, suggestive of the desecration of Famine graves that so horrified contemporary observers of the time.[9] The ragged surface of the bronze (the work's most significant aesthetic accomplishment) and distended proportions accentuate the bleakness of the spectral figures and their haunted expression. Though complete avoidance of the monumental in this context is impossible, the slight enlargement of the figures does not overly aggrandize their suffering to the point of banality or theatre. In interview

7 Gillespie, in Tom Burke, 'Sculpting Life: The Work of Rowan Gillespie.' Moondance Productions in association with RTÉ, 30 July 2007.

8 Ciara Ferguson, 'Horror and Hope: Ciara Ferguson Talks to Ka Award Candidate Rowan Gillespie about his Amazing Famine Sculpture.' *Sunday Independent*, 1 June 1997.

9 Incidentally, the composition recalls Dublin's other Famine memorial by Edward Delaney (1967), which combines skeletal figures and an animal (commonly interpreted – though not intended – as a dog), a choice that proved somewhat controversial in the 1960s: Delaney, *Breaking the Mould*, 194-5.

Gillespie remarked on the irony of the sculpture's adoption as a monument to the Famine:

> It's strange that everyone thinks of it as the Famine monument, because everything I did was to try and stop it from being monumental, thinking how humble and pathetic and lonely these people were, and then trying to make it so that you almost become one of them, when you're with them [… however, if] the sculpture in Dublin has become the Dublin Famine Memorial, it's not for me to actually say no it's not, if that's what it represents to people – it has to be allowed to have a life of its own.[10]

Certainly no other figural group has come closer to a successful representational approach to the Famine, if judged on the basis of the work's public popularity and generally positive reception. In Smurfit's view, the emotional response generated by the figures qualifies the work as a success:

> Over the years I've taken people down, especially at nighttime, especially for Americans or people who've come from abroad, and literally people cry sometimes. Something surges through them and they feel that's their past and they've come back to it.[11]

Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the use of emaciated human bodies to represent Famine remains a problematic undertaking: the 'emotional trigger' deployed by the spectre of the gaunt Famine victim is nearly always the product of a spectacular relationship between viewer and subject. While some may approve of the 'shock value' and emotional response evinced by sculptural realism, others have questioned the frequent gendering of such images, the fetishization of the Famine body or the ethics of representing the alien other;[12] indeed, there are immense difficulties in guarding a realist figurative statement against the temptations of sonorous sentimentality. Art critic for *The Irish Times* Aidan Dunne expressed similar reservations to the piece:

> Rowan Gillespie's Famine sculpture, it wouldn't be one of my favourite

10 Interview with Gillespie (2007).

11 Norma Smurfit, in Burke, 'Sculpting Life.'

12 These issues, while applying also to the figuring of historical famine, have charged the politics and ethics of contemporary Famine imagery, recently explored in the exhibition *Imaging Famine* in the *Guardian*'s newsroom, investigating the practice of African famine photography. David Campbell and others, '*Imaging Famine* Exhibition,' (London: *The Guardian* Newsroom, Archive and Visitor Centre, 2005).

> pieces [...] I say that knowing that it's a very popular piece of work and people do like it. I'm a bit uneasy about it because it seems to me like an easy, sentimental story. I think that perhaps art should do something more or be a bit more than that.[13]

For Dunne such narrative accessibility precludes the work's functioning as a genuine provocation, as the skilful rendering of the *Famine* figures impresses but never exceeds our presuppositions of the Famine's brutality. In an age of over-saturation of images of suffering and violence inflicted upon the body, perhaps other strategies are necessary to jolt us out of fictive complacencies.

As ever, site and context powerfully influence the reception of public monuments. The siting of the Famine memorial adjacent to the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Dublin's own contemporary monument to the values of modern Ireland, sat poorly with some commentators,[14] but the location was selected, after a review of many potential Dublin sites, because of the historical appropriateness of the setting (as many emigrants left from the Custom House quays), the presence of an adequate and proportional space being cobbled at the time on the docks, and the enthusiasm of the Docklands planners for the work.[15] Not so fortunate were other tactics to align past with present at the physical site of the memorial. A campaign led by Smurfit to raise funds for homeless relief in Ireland drew protests through its selling of space beneath the feet of the *Famine*'s emaciated figures to the tune of £1,000 each (£5,000 for corporate sponsors).[16] In a critique published in *The Irish Times* Fintan O'Toole attacked the scheme and the instrumentalization of Famine memory that in his view prompted facile identifications with Famine suffering:

> How fine it must be, in these times when the petty people are murmuring about taxes and scandals, to know that, rich as you are, you are really one of history's victims. You may live in exile for tax purposes, but you are at one with these starved, hunted people, about to embark on a coffin ship from Dublin docks. You may be tired of pommes de terre dauphinoise, but you share the dread of these poor peasants as they pulled up the roots and found them blackened and slimy. For there you are, immortalized in bronze, your name stitched forever into a proud nation's tribute to the anonymous dead.[17]

13 Sheehy, 'Rays of Light?

14 Roy Foster, BBC Radio 3 'Night Waves' programme, 22 October 2007.

15 Interview with Gillespie (2007).

16 Fintan O'Toole, 'The Great and Good Join Famine Roll-Call.' *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 28 October 1998.

17 Fintan O'Toole, 'Turning the Famine into Corporate Celebration.' *The Irish Times*

Action from Ireland followed suit, issuing a statement declaring 'The use of the sacred memory of the Famine dead as a means of boosting corporate and individual egos is, to say the least, gross and insensitive.'[18] Despite the initial installation of a few names (with Gerry Adams, John Hume, Michael Flatley, Gay Byrne and Richard Branson making up part of the odd collective), and Smurfit's insistence that the names would be unobtrusive and placed at a distance, the project eventually lost momentum and efforts to create a 'sea of names' went unrealized.

As the outcry demonstrated, sensitivities over the ownership and legacy of Famine memory in Ireland still resisted easy resolutions offered by commemorative gestures, sharpened by an intensifying concern over the growing social inequalities and culture of greed that accompanied wealth accumulation in the wake of the Celtic Tiger. In an echo of *Collier's Magazine*'s blithely optimistic 1951 cover story 'Ireland: From Great Famine to Great Future', in 2005 photographer John Kane won the inaugural GoIreland.com Photography Award with his image entitled 'From Famine Ships to Partnerships', a dramatic nightscape setting the Famine group against the Dublin skyline with the Ulster Bank prominently illuminated against the starved figures. The winning photograph was published as a postcard through the John Hinde Group as part of an effort to seek new images capturing the spirit of contemporary Ireland – an image now tinged with no small degree of irony, as young Irish people today catch the airport shuttle a few steps away, compelled to emigrate once again in the wake of Ireland's recent, now self-inflicted, economic collapse.

The history of public art patronage has long been shared between the collective and the single powerful individual; in the case of monumental art there is no fixed correlation between method of commission and success of outcome, yet the example of the Famine has illustrated the dangers of individual aggrandizement within a space of memory held to be in the public domain. Indeed, the organizers of the *Cambridge Famine Memorial* unveiled in 1997 were eager to stress their 'grassroots' committee make-up and modest $50,000 budget, despite the fact that they too received the bulk of their funding from a single individual;[19] such qualities served also to distinguish

(Dublin), 16 October 1998.

18 Joe Humphreys, 'Famine Initiative to Raise Funds Seen as Offensive.' *The Irish Times* (Dublin), 30 October 1998.

19 Kevin Cullen, 'Beyond Class and Clan: Debate on Irish Famine Memorial Brings Cambridge Sides Together.' *The Boston Globe*, 4 October 1996. John O'Connor, a leading Boston developer and environmental activist, contributed the bulk of the $50,000 cost of the monument, sculpted by Maurice Harron.

Figure 6.2
Irish Famine Memorial, Robert Shure, Boston, Massachusetts (1998) Boston Irish Famine Memorial Committee and City of Boston

their project from what has become possibly the most controversial Famine sculpture yet conceived, the Boston *Irish Famine Memorial* (Fig. 6.2).

The monument, created by Robert Shure, is sited at the intersection of School and Washington Streets, a central urban square situated on Boston's 'Freedom Trail', a network of American heritage sites connected along a heavily publicized tourist route.[20] The monument consists of two bronze statues of three figures, elevated on circular granite plinths and set into a 6,000 square foot paved plaza with granite seating and a series of eight interpretative plaques mounted on stone blocks. The first sculptural group portrays the misery and starvation of Ireland through the bodies of a ragged, skeletal family crouched in poses of despair and defeat; the second, another family group representing success in America, now well-fed and dressed, strides confidently towards the future, interrupted only by the backwards glance of the maternal figure.

In 1997 high-powered real estate developer Thomas Flatley met with Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and agreed to take leadership over the initiative to raise a major Famine memorial in Boston city. A native of Mayo who emigrated to the U.S. in 1950, before his death in 2008 Flatley had become one of the top 300 wealthiest Americans, with an estimated fortune of $1.4 billion.[21] Flatley enthusiastically took up the challenge of constructing the memorial, forming a committee in 1996 and swiftly setting in motion plans for a $2 million project, half designated for the monument and the remainder intended for an institute to study and relieve issues of world hunger. Flatley's pride in and ambition for the project were unequivocal: 'This is the world's first full memorial to the famine victims [...] It's been called the mother of all memorials.'[22] Described as a means 'to remember and then to forgive the travesty our ancestors endured, part of a healing process occurring in Irish enclaves throughout the world as the 150th anniversary of the Famine',[23] this sculpture would be no grim portrayal (as in Cambridge) of Irish suffering and estrangement; rather, it sought to capture in bronze a literal representation of Flatley's own belief in America as the Land of Opportunity:

20 http://www.thefreedomtrail.org. The Boston monument would subsequently be designated part of the Boston Irish Tourism Association's newly conceived 'Irish Heritage Trail'.

21 Julie Jette, 'T.J. Flatley: The Billionaire Next Door.' *The Patriot Ledger (Quincy, MA)*, 28 October 2000.

22 Dana Bisbee, 'Irish Famine Memorial Raises Lucky $2M at Gala.' *The Boston Herald*, 14 March 1998.

23 Thomas J. Flatley, 'Honoring Ancestors, History.' *The Boston Herald*, 17 June 1996.

> [...] we also wanted to celebrate the struggle that led to the triumph, not to appear self-serving but to inspire those who continue to emigrate with their meagre possessions and wealth of ambitions. For triumph is the last leg of the odyssey that all immigrants envision when they seek out the American Dream.[24]

Flatley's design committee included a cross-section of Boston's Irish elite, albeit without input from civic public art professionals. In the summer of 1996 a closed competition was held to solicit possible designs for the memorial, and sculptor Robert Shure awarded the commission in April 1997. After a successful gala fundraising event in March 1998 (where $2 million was raised for the project), the memorial was finally unveiled at a ceremony on 28 June 1998 to a crowd of over 7,000 spectators.

Shure specializes in large public commissions in his Woburn, MA studio, mostly based on the figurative depiction or commemoration of historic individuals or events. His work has most often been commissioned by universities (*Sigmund Freud*, Clark University, MA, 2000) or as public monuments (*National Pony Express Monument*, Salt Lake City, UT, 1998). Prior to the Famine memorial, Shure's best known Boston work was the giant bronze Teddy bear commissioned by the FAO Schwartz toy company in 1991 (now sited in front of Boston's Floating Hospital for Children). Though much of the controversy which followed the Boston unveiling played out against the backdrop of public art discourse, it is worth noting that Shure makes his career as an essentially commercial sculptor, responding directly to specific briefs with generally literal translations of the subjects required by committees.[25] Shure's willingness to work to the direction of the committee resulted in a final work dictated largely by Flatley's own preconceptions of a suitable representation: 'It's a narrative piece, simple and narrative and that's what they wanted.'[26] Flatley would later add, 'Most experiences with artists, you're dealing with people who are quite absolute – talented, but they often have little tolerance for the rest of us. Bob Shure was absolutely interested in our ideas.'[27] Project manager Nancy Wood agreed: 'He makes sure his work expresses what we want him to express.'[28] A sub-committee formed to

24 Thomas J. Flatley, 'Memorial is a Symbol of City Unity.' *The Boston Herald*, 26 June 1998.

25 Interview with Robert Shure (Artist), 5 April 2007. Shure also maintains a significant line of work in historical replicas of classical sculpture.

26 Interview with Shure (2007).

27 Michael Blownen, 'Sculptor a Presence on Streets of Boston.' *The Boston Globe*, 21 June 1998.

28 Nancy Kelleher, 'Woburn Sculptor Brings Concept to Life.' *The Boston Herald*, 26 June 1998.

research various details of the monument (shoes, basket, etc.), passing the information to Shure and approving its final execution by him.[29]

Concerns over the visual and aesthetic expression of the piece seemed to take a distinctly secondary role, as easy readability of the suffering-to-success storyline and development of adjacent text preoccupied the committee.[30] In interview Shure noted that the rapid timescale for the work led to a result he felt was not fully resolved:

> I felt with more time I think I could have made a better monument, and it was one of the first big ones I ever did [...] the basic design would have been the same, but I think there were some things from an artistic point of view that I would have improved. A little bit of anatomy, composition [...] that type of thing [...] A lot of times with this kind of work you're not the one calling the shots [...] All in all my main obligation is to the committee, and not to what an art critic would say or not say.[31]

Certainly, critics did have plenty say about the work. After the fanfare surrounding the unveiling died down, Fintan O'Toole was the first to step into the fray:

> The actual monument, the permanent mark of this global, maturing Irish identity, is a dreadful piece of kitsch. Beautifully crafted kitsch, certainly. Expensive kitsch – it cost a million dollars – but kitsch nonetheless. It shows not an ability to face our past, but a complete inability to imagine it. As a memorial to the dead, it offers pious clichés and dead conventions. As an effort to confront a national trauma, it shows a depressing immaturity.[32]

29 Interview with Shure (2007).

30 The text's development was overseen by Thomas O'Connor, historian at Boston College. Committee member Paul O'Brien on development of the text: '"We had one version that sounded like the IRA manifesto and another that sounded like a graduation speech," he said, but the group settled on a middle course that acknowledged the "callous" British while also focusing on the Irish triumph over adversity.' In Michael P. Quinlin, 'Boston's Irish Famine Memorial Tells a Story Worth Hearing.' *The Boston Globe*, 27 June 1998.

31 Interview with Shure (2007). Shure reiterated these sentiments in a recent interview with WBUR Boston public radio: Andrea Shea, 'Love It Or Hate It? Nominate The "Worst Public Art In New England."' *WBUR 90.9 – Boston's NPR Station* (Boston), 25 October 2010; available at http://www.wbur.org/2010/10/25/bad-art.

32 Fintan O'Toole, '$1m Famine Memorial a Monument to Kitsch.' *The Irish Times*, 3 July 1998.

O'Toole's *Irish Times* review excoriated the monument for its lack of emotional impact, drippy sentimentality, and 'beefy' figure group redolent of a Fascist aesthetic. The simplistic storyline was attacked as an offensive and banal reduction of suffering into the cliché of the 'American Dream':

> The awkward reality is that those most profoundly affected by the Famine didn't triumph over adversity. They died. So did their world, but if you want the deaths of a million people and the implosion of a culture to be easy to comprehend, you're going to end up with something trite and fatuous.[33]

Though O'Toole's article drew an acidic response from committee president Michael Quinlin,[34] a more widely read and divisive review shortly followed from Christine Temin, art critic with *The Boston Globe*, launching the monument into a heated forum of public discussion. Temin canvassed responses to the work from local art and museum professionals: 'It's an embarrassment', 'a missed opportunity', 'A clichéd melodrama in an incredibly visible public space'. Temin's ire was especially directed toward Flatley's dominance of the project and the Boston Art Commission's permission for the project to proceed without any input from experienced public art professionals through a restrictive closed competition. Arguing that money, influence and ignorance had combined to generate a 'poor product from a poor process', Temin declared:

> Flatley's committee settled for hamburger because they'd never heard of steak and didn't bother reading the menu. They didn't explore the great possibilities of current public art, and they didn't allow anyone with knowledge of those possibilities to help them.[35]

Letters poured in from both sides, some applauding Temin for her appraisal:

> 'the healthy figures look more like aliens than humans.'
>
> 'caught in a dead formula […] tasteless.'
>
> '[Temin's review] is bold, insightful […] the dumbing down of our public art is shameful.'

33 O'Toole, '$1m Famine Memorial.'
34 Michael P. Quinlin, 'Letter to the Editor – Boston Famine Memorial.' *The Irish Times*, 28 July 1998.
35 Christine Temin, 'The Public's Art?' *The Boston Globe*, 30 August 1998.

> '[an] abysmal Irish Famine monument.'

And others attacking Temin's perceived elitism or targeting of Flatley:

> 'grounded in intellectual snobbery [...] condescending, paternalistic and insulting.'
>
> 'Flatley does not need to be told what good art is nor should anybody else be told.'
>
> 'The memorial is a marvellous portrayal of the irony of one of history's most cruel and inhuman episodes forging the resilient and faithful Irish into Boston's and the nation's glorious heritage.' [written by a committee member]
>
> 'a one-sided, mean-spirited attach on artist Robert Shure, the Boston Art Commission, and chairman Tom Flatley.'[36]

Those who wrote in to support Temin largely based their commentary on the monument's formal success as a work of art, while opponents took exactly the opposite tact, defending the work in terms of its accessibility, taking umbrage with art world snobbery or insisting on the sanctity of its emotive subject matter. In response, Flatley issued a statement reiterating his description of the project, but refrained from acknowledging any of Temin's criticisms, save for responding, 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.'[37] The issue was subsequently addressed by the ombudsman of the *Boston Globe* who wrote an op-ed piece entitled 'Was Globe's Critic Too Hard on Irish Famine Memorial?' In it he concluded that Temin's piece had strayed too far into the realm of personal attack, though he gave space over to both the arts editor and Temin to expand on their points of view:

> [...] we wouldn't be having this conversation if Flatley were not one of the most powerful people in Boston and able to organize a response. That's his right, but our critic has a right, and a duty, to say what she thinks about the work and how it got to where it got. This is an important site. You and your children and your children's children will live with this all their lives, and why? Because one powerful man decided this is what we should see. [Scott Power, arts editor]

36 Various authors, 'Letters to the Editor.' *The Boston Globe*, 6-20 September 1998.

37 Thomas J. Flatley, 'Letter to the Editor: The Beauty of Boston Irish Famine Memorial.' *The Boston Globe*, 13 September 1998.

> This is the biggest public art fiasco in Boston, and why? One guy's ignorance and arrogance. What people like Flatley do is to try to turn this into a them-us, a cultural elite versus the little people, but there is absolutely no one in any camp in the professional art world who would go to bat for that thing […] Go down there at lunch and see people slurping submarine sandwiches next to a women clutching her starving child. If it had power, no one would do that. [Christine Temin][38]

The intense response provoked by the Boston memorial is certainly unique amongst Famine monumental commemorations, many of which have favoured similarly simplified subjects couched in banal (if popular) artistic literalism, but have passed with little public comment or note. In hindsight the reasons for the furore can be broken down into several catalysts: first was the lack of public art specialist consultation, allowing for little outside influence or potential for negotiation. The control exerted by the Boston committee over the artistic work is highly unusual in major public art commissioning practice, and as a management technique was ill-suited for the making of acclaimed public art or subsequent public relations. Second was the already contentious climate in Boston surrounding mechanisms of public art oversight in Boston, which formed the backdrop of many published complaints. Finally, there is the contentious nature of the Famine's memory and legacy, a territory already transgressed in Dublin and persistently contested throughout the course of the commemorations. The assumption by the committee that their uncomplicated view of Irish Famine heritage would be universally shared and celebrated attests to a narrowness of perspective, denying history's contingency and their own complicity in shaping the past.

A commemorative project dealing with any one or two of these issues might still manage a successful monument, but their combination has relegated the Boston *Irish Famine Memorial* to anachronism instead of 'glorious' aspiration: four years later, five arts professionals polled on their opinion of Boston's best and worst public monuments rated the Famine memorial at the bottom,[39] and as recently as 2010 the monument topped the list of nominees for the 'Worst Public Art in New England' on a popular art criticism blog.[40] Despite this unfortunate outcome, the

38 Jack Thomas, 'Op-Ed: Was Globe's Critic Too Hard on Irish Famine Memorial?' *The Boston Globe*, 21 September 1998.

39 'Greater Boston's Public Art: The Best and the Worst.' *The Boston Globe*, 18 August 2002.

40 Greg Cook, 'Worst Public Art Nominations so Far,' from *The New England Journal of Aesthetic Research* (blog), 17 September 2010; available at http://gregcookland.com/journal/2010/09/17/worst-public-art-nominations-so-far/. See also Shea, 'Love It Or Hate It?'

intentions of the committee and Flatley were certainly genuine, and their desires to connect with contemporary immigrant experience[41] were surely well-intended. However, the call to Famine memory without due consideration of its limitations, even falsehoods, prompts meaningless and circuitous categorizations of self with respect to history and suffering – as with Mary Robinson's declaration during her 1996 visit to the Boston memorial that 'we are survivors of the survivors' – granting tacit approval to diasporic and Irish historical narcissisms that paradoxically threaten to overtake the benevolent sentiments which stimulated them in the first place.

Murrisk, Co. Mayo and Philadelphia

Distinguishing between origins and beginnings, Edward Said defined the former as divine and immutable, the latter as selective and freely chosen, 'designated in order to indicate, clarify or define a later time, place, or action'.[42] As the watershed event commonly charged with the acceleration of Irish modernity and the formation of the diaspora, Famine visuality is replete with such signifiers of beginnings. The builders of many monuments have sought metaphors and symbols that embody this link (and break) between an old world and the new, representations anchoring narratives of the past that might explain our present existence or position. Symbols or references to voyage have equally dominated many contemporary Famine memorials, nowhere more strikingly so than the two memorials located in Murrisk, Co. Mayo (Fig. 6.3) and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Fig. 6.4). The choice of subject for the sculptures, the 'coffin ship', is itself a barometer of contemporary attitudes to Famine history, memory and commemorative symbolism. Modes of transport substitute as symbols of oppression in the two other historical experiences most commonly cited in Famine commemorative material, namely, the slave ships of the nineteenth century and the railways boxcars of the Holocaust.[43] In the nationalist context, Famine-era ships have long been emblematic of British colonial cruelty, most familiarly in John

41 Readers of the eight narrative plaques at the unveiling ceremony included students from Vietnam and Rwanda, a U.S. Medal of Honor winner, a Holocaust survivor, an Irish native, an Irish immigrant, and two Irish Americans. Scott Allen, '7,000 Hail Unveiling of Irish Memorial.' *The Boston Globe*, 29 June 1998.

42 Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 8.

43 Historical parallels between the Famine exodus, Atlantic slave passage and the Holocaust are drawn repeatedly in the various ephemera produced to accompany unveilings of several monuments, and most potently in the structure and text of the New York and New Jersey Famine school curricula: Archdeacon, 'The Irish Famine in American School Curricula'.

Figure 6.3 *National Famine Memorial/Ghost Ship*,
John Behan, Murrisk, Co. Mayo (1997)
Irish National Famine Commemoration Committee

Mitchel's image of 'ships full of grain, leaving Ireland's shores for England while the nation starved.'[44] Robert Scally described the coffin ship as 'the central panel of the famine triptych', flanked on either side by departure from Skibbereen and arrival at Grosse Île in Canada.[45] Within the mythic geography of Famine passage the coffin ship variously signifies forced exodus and estrangement from an island nation, the limbo of migration, the descent into the underworld of suffering and death experienced en route, and eventual arrival to an uncertain future.[46] Yet some historians have questioned over-reliance on 'coffin ship' terminology and its influence as metaphor for emigrant experience: Mary Daly describes it as an 'excessively emotive term, given that the overwhelming majority of emigrants survived the trip';[47] Cormac Ó Gráda has similarly pointed out the difficulties in reconciling the traditional view of the 'death passage' with the historical facts of high survival rates combined with the improved economic circumstances of both successful immigrants and those who did in fact survive the Famine.[48] Statistically representative or not, the reality as manifested by these two memorials is that the 'coffin ship' continues to function as shorthand for the suffering and deprivation of Famine-afflicted Ireland, but to different effect undoubtedly shaped by which the side of the Atlantic one stands upon.

The monument designated as Ireland's 'National Famine Memorial' lies in the village of Murrisk, Co. Mayo, just outside Westport. Created by sculptor John Behan, the monument was installed by the Office of Public Works and unveiled by Mary Robinson in 1997 as the government's official commemorative activities drew to a close. In August 1995 Chairperson of the Famine Commemoration Committee Avril Doyle had issued a call in the national press for suggestions on locating the National Famine Memorial, and sixty-five proposals from towns across Ireland were considered; by mid-1996 the Murrisk site had been selected. It takes as its setting one of the oldest and most significant Christian and pre-Christian religious sites in

44 Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland, (Perhaps).*

45 Robert Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland*, 218. See also Edward Laxton, *The Famine Ships: The Irish Exodus to America* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

46 The prevalence of ship and passage imagery within emigration paintings and engravings of the nineteenth century affirms a long history of such iconographic appeal and flexibility; similar observations have recently been made with respect to post-Famine literature: Marguérite Corporaal and Christopher Cusack, 'The Coffin Ship as a Site of Immigrants' Identity Formation in Irish and Irish American Fiction, 1855-85.' *Atlantic Studies: Literary, Cultural and Historical Perspectives* 8, no. 3 (2011): 343–59.

47 Mary Daly, 'Review Article: Historians and the Famine: A Beleaguered Species?' *Irish Historical Studies* 30, no. 120, November (1997): 591–601.

48 Cormac Ó Gráda and Kevin O'Rourke, 'Migration as Disaster Relief: Lessons from the Great Irish Famine.' *European Review of Economic History* 1, April (1997): 3–26; Ó Gráda, 'Making History in Ireland.' .

western Ireland: Croagh Patrick, the mountain St Patrick is believed to have ascended and fasted upon for the duration of Lent in 441. The site's dramatic beauty and religious significance have ensured a steady flow of visitors for thousands of years; in recent years, the last Sunday of July (known as Reek Sunday) may find 25,000 pilgrims ascending the mountain, and a modern visitors' centre built in 2000 offers interpretive materials, guides, souvenirs and refreshment to hikers and pilgrims. The main Westport-Louisburgh road separates the visitor centre and entry point to Croagh Patrick from a small park where the Famine Memorial resides; its proximity to this heavily travelled tourist route renders the work highly visible, and its incorporation into the network of heritage attractions of West Mayo (visually constructed and marketed to visitors as sites of uninhabited, scenic beauty) is evidenced by the numerous postcards and promotional material featuring the monument, whose nightly illumination imparts a ghostly presence at the border of land and sea.

A prominent figure within the Irish art community over the last forty years and elected member of Aosdána, John Behan's many public commissions include *Flight of Birds* (1988), *Wings of the World* (1992), *Twin Spires* (1999) and *Equality Emerging* (2001).[49] Working primarily in bronze, Behan frequently takes as subject episodes of Irish myth, literature and history; since making a mark with his early sculptures of bulls, Behan has continued in the tradition of Irish sculptors like Oisín Kelly and Edward Delaney, the latter of whom he assisted in the 1960s to create Delaney's *Wolfe Tone* and *Famine* group in St Stephen's Green (1967). In the 1960s Behan was associated with a generation of Irish artists (including Michael Kane and James McKenna) who rejected internationally popular forms of abstract modernism in favour of a return to figurative art; in refusing the stultifying influence of both Irish academic style and what he viewed as the slavish imitation of continental modernism, Behan's practice evolved a rough-hewn form of expressionism yet inflected with 'a local accent'[50] and grounded in Irish mythic symbology.

His work typically offers recognizable socio-historical and symbolic references executed in a distinctive figurative and expressionistic style, features which have no doubt contributed to his success in garnering many public commissions. The significance of the National Famine Memorial project to Behan was dramatically illustrated by the opening image on his personal website which featured a photograph of the artist silhouetted against the finished memorial, and his own later reflections on the commission: 'It's

49 Hayden Murphy, *John Behan: Poet of Structure* (Dublin: Scepter Publishers, 1970); Brian Fallon, *John Behan: Sculpture 1960–1994* (Galway: Galway Arts Festival, 1994).

50 Fallon, *John Behan*, 6.

certainly the most popular thing I've ever done, with real public awareness. You're very lucky to get a commission like that once in your lifetime that can have that effect.'[51] Unusually, in the case of most large Irish public art commissions, Behan was invited by Doyle and the Famine Commemoration Committee to create a design for the monument (as opposed to an open competition), working alongside OPW architect Mary McKenna to realize the final piece.[52] Behan's interest in the Famine dates from the early 1990s when he independently began exploring the subject, adapting well-known images from *The Illustrated London News* into small sculptures, including 'Bridget O'Donnel and Children', 'After the Ejectment' and 'Funeral at Skibbereen'.[53] From over a dozen initial images and drawings Behan selected the coffin ship as 'the most successful in terms of its expression' and the final subject for the memorial. In discussing his choice and relationship with the subject, Behan remarked:

> It's a universal image as well – emigration, immigration – and it's happening again […] it's a modern phenomenon […] The Famine is not something abstract, that's my view of things as an artist […] what I was dealing with was black despair and hopelessness, and how you deal with that. I solved it with the skeletal figures and the lost souls. It has a ghostly aspect as well.[54]

Behan's earlier title for the piece, 'Ghost Ship', encapsulates its stark imagery: a chain of life-sized, grimacing skeletons twist through the air to form a macabre rigging, shackled to a roughly sculpted ship with no sails. Viewed facing east, the cross-like, empty masts point towards the summit of Croagh Patrick. Although the skeletons' contortions and flying movement have led to their interpretation as figures 'rising above human suffering', the tortured expression of the figures and their integration into the structure of the ship contradict this reading. Behan has related the hull's texture 'to the mountainside, to the ridges, to the rivulets, to the streams running down, to the lazybeds, to the bones of the earth that show through';[55] the jagged texture of the horizontal furrows likewise resembles turf-cutting, with the artist's

51 Interview with John Behan (Artist), 7 June 2007.

52 In interview Doyle remarked that this direct commissioning practice would not have been possible today under the current strict government tendering regulations: Interview with Doyle (2007).

53 Editions of these works, along with many other Famine sculptural maquettes and small-scale works, may be found in the *Ireland's Great Hunger Museum* of Quinnipiac University in Connecticut (opened 2012).

54 Interview with Behan (2007).

55 'John Behan's Famine Ship'.

chisel replacing the bog-digger's spade, creating surfaces similar to those exposed throughout the Irish countryside. The creaky slats of un-seaworthy Famine-era ships did in fact serve as metaphorical coffin planking for many passengers who died en route; the substitution of burrow-like forms for wooden beams in the memorial's hull reflects the reality that death began, for many, in the potato fields long before others' journey commenced. For Behan, the symbol of the coffin ship was thus capable of carrying a range of associations across Famine experiences, its primitive and airless interior also suggestive of the cramped conditions of Ireland's workhouses, one of which he visited as part of his process of research.

Green patination applied to the surface of the bronze adds to an eerie, weathered effect that moves the piece beyond realism towards the supernatural; not an emigrant rite of passage but a voyage to the underworld. Surface and form assert the violence of Famine, gouged and mottled, as earth, bone and wood collapse into one another. The bleakness of Behan's conception gains fuller thrust by the decision to install the work at ground level and avoid descriptive text, the surface inviting a tactile response. Nevertheless, this is artwork conceived as monument, and communicated via scale (at over 20 feet tall) and formal setting. In selecting the familiar 'coffin ship' image of death and passage, Behan opted for legibility and emotional impact over complexity or diversity of narrative, and the public success of the 'Famine ship' may be attested by its incorporation into organized tours, wide reproduction online and in print, and Behan's ongoing production of smaller versions for private sale. However, art critical comment on the work is almost entirely absent, perhaps, as Behan believes, because critics in Ireland typically adopt 'an ambivalent attitude about monuments';[56] but more likely is that it neither offends through hackneyed cliché nor surprises with an unusual representational solution to the dilemma of representing Famine.

The trajectory of Famine ship iconography from celebratory maritime canvases, like Edwin Hayes' *An Emigrant Ship, Dublin Bay, Sunset* (National Gallery of Ireland, 1853), to romanticized social subject pictures, like John Charles Dollman's *The Immigrants' Ship* (Art Gallery of South Australia, 1884), finds its inversion in Behan's ghoulish rendering, but the centrality of the experience of passage (emotional and geographical) and the conflicted duality of these ships' appeal as figures of despair and opportunity persists. These contradictions are nowhere more evident than in the two replica Famine-era ship projects undertaken during the commemorative period, the *Dunbrody* (launched in 2001, permanently moored in New Ross, Co. Wexford) and the *Jeanie Johnston* (launched in 2002, now primarily docked

56 John Behan, 'Viewpoints: Sculpture and Commemoration of the Famine.' *Sculptors' Society of Ireland Newsletter* January-February (1998): 17.

in Dublin). The *Dunbrody* project, funded in the main by the Wexford-based John F. Kennedy Trust and an array of public and private sources (including Wexford County Council, New Ross Town Council and Fáilte Ireland) has evolved into a major tourism draw for the area. In 2011 the heritage site was further expanded with the addition of a 'National Emigration Centre' containing an 'Irish America Hall of Fame' and an 'Irish America Day' held on 4 July 2012.[57] The course of the *Jeanie Johnston*, in contrast, has run far from smooth. Conceived in the early 1990s, the protracted complications of its construction and funding (with its original budget doubling and extensive project delays) were widely reported in the Irish media, owing to its high profile as a central project of the Famine Commemoration Committee, and disputes with public funding partners, including FÁS and Tralee County Council.[58] Despite significant differences in process and outcome, both ships offer similar visitor experiences when docked, relying on costumed interpretation (*Dunbrody*) or mannequin-heavy audio-visual displays (*Jeanie Johnston*) to effect a 'transportation' of the viewer to the cramped conditions of the nineteenth-century passenger experience. On-board literature and guides persist at length to emphasize that the 'real' *Jeanie Johnston* and *Dunbrody* never (or rarely) lost passengers from disease or the effects of starvation, unlike the infamous coffin ships of the period. The extent to which this distinction is achieved in the public's eyes is dubious, as the ships' attempts to evince an emotional response from visitors are reliant on evoking the very image from which they dissociate: after all, millions would scarcely have been spent to commemorate a thriving transport business. The emotional core of each project is in fact a coffin ship, but the negative connotations of this image (while everywhere suggested) are filtered through the medium of a successful immigrant ship, and tragedy mitigated by narratives of arrival and triumph. Such an effect couldn't be more dissimilar from the Behan work which, despite the exhortations of the interpretative brochure, presents a bleak and non-redemptive view of the Famine sufferer's destiny. The same cannot be said for Behan's companion piece *Arrival*, commissioned three years later by the Irish government and gifted to the United Nations in 2000, now installed on its outdoor sculpture plaza. Given

57 See 'Special Supplement: Dunbrody Famine Ship, New Ross Co Wexford.' *Irish America*, April/May 2011; Elaine Larkin and Alex Ronan, 'Build It and They Will Come.' *Irish America*, April/May 2012.

58 Bought by the Dublin Docklands Authority in 2005 for €2.7 million (after a final project cost of €14 million), the *Jeanie Johnston* constituted a collaborative shipbuilding project based in Tralee, Co. Kerry (in part funded by FÁS) which undertook a major transatlantic voyage to the U.S. and Canada in 2003, and has since regularly sailed as a training vessel, a participant in 'tall ships' events and as a corporate entertainment venue.

the title 'The New Dawn' by Behan, the work depicts immigrants crowded on the decks of a three-masted ship beginning their disembarkation into America. Far less successful in its execution and complicated by its installation among other divergent sculptural 'gifts' dating from various periods and nations, the piece was inaccessible for several years owing to security measures implemented following 11 September 2001, and remains little known.

The ethos of the replica Famine ships is more explicitly delivered in the second major memorial to base its design on the image of a voyage between two worlds: the Philadelphia *Irish Memorial* (Fig. 6.4). The 7-ton bronze sculpture measures 30 feet long, 12 feet tall and 12 feet wide, raised on a 2-foot black granite plinth. The work was unveiled in 2003 near Penn's Landing, the point of disembarkation of emigrant ships; as with Behan's sculpture it lies in close proximity to an equivalent site of American secular pilgrimage: Independence National Historical Park, site of the Liberty Bell and the colonial buildings where the foundations of American self-government were forged. Thousands of schoolchildren visit the park annually; the Philadelphia *Irish Memorial* has been envisaged by its creators as another chapter in the narration of American history as experienced by visitors to Philadelphia's heritage sites.[59] The sculptor Glenna Goodacre was selected for the commission through an international competition,[60] although an earlier design by Cork sculptor Kenneth Thompson had previously been selected for a less expensive initiative in 1993 that was eventually abandoned three years later. Approximately $2.75 million was raised for the current monument site by the organization Irish Memorial, Inc., whose honorary board and sponsors included several senators, at least seven Irish-American groups (including the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, who initiated the project), then-president of Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, and the city mayor and governor-elect of Pennsylvania, Edward G. Rendell. Dubbed 'America's Sculptor' on her website and promotional materials, Goodacre's major works leading up to the Philadelphia commission included the modelling of the Sacagawea U.S. one dollar coin, a bronze of President

59 Details of the memorial's development and construction process were provided in commemorative materials published by the memorial committee, and interview with John Donovan (President, Irish Memorial Inc.), 15 June 2005.

60 Thirty-two responses were received and narrowed down to three finalists. In interview, Donovan described the other two finalists as incorporating more abstract designs (one using steel beams and the other concrete). The committee chose to stage a public event with the three models, evaluating the designs according to the emotional impact they had on viewers. Donovan described the three goals of the monument as commemoration of the event, education of people on the subject of Irish suffering and injustice, and a celebration the contribution of the Irish to the U.S.

Figure 6.4 *Irish Memorial*, Glenna Goodacre (2003)
Irish Memorial, Inc.

Ronald Reagan at his Presidential Library (1998) and the Vietnam Women's Memorial in D.C. (1993).[61]

The Famine memorial project included the development of its surrounding plaza by landscape architect Pauline Hurley-Kurtz into a 1.75 acre park planted with indigenous Irish and Pennsylvania flora and flanked by an Ogham stone 'etched with a poetic remembrance of this historic event'. Paths constructed along a pre- and post-immigration historical timeline are accompanied by interpretive stations whose patterns recall the Irish megalithic site of Newgrange.[62] In a nod to the Irish *National Famine Memorial* and the sacred mountain, a stone from Croagh Patrick is also included in the central planter and marked with a ringed cross, designating it 'a place of ceremony'[63] where 'a bowl of shamrocks will be placed each St. Patrick's Day'[64]. With paths 'oriented to frame specific views depicting the principal themes in the sculpture'[65] and Irish and American flags staking out the monument's territory, the entire complex adopts an array of stock signifiers of 'Irishness', an approach mirrored by the form of the memorial sculpture itself.

Over thirty life-sized figures follow a narrative progression from the poverty and death of Ireland, depicted on the lower sloping end of the memorial, through the ordeal of immigration (represented as a movement away from the landscape and into the structure of a ship) and, finally, a hopeful (if fearful) arrival in America as figures descend a gangway. The complicated composition presents a continuous narrative that unfolds on all sides of the work, the crowding figures intended as metonymy for the millions. The sculpture's elevation on a large plinth contributes to the overall theatrical effect: a tableau of figures poised in various expressions of despair, anguish and elation. Figural groups are worked out in complex poses and relationships in order to advance the narrative, with emphasis placed on individual psychology wrought through gesture, expression and the physiognomy of each figure. The overall effect is imposing, given the size and technical difficulty of the composition, and operatic in scale and conceit: a Famine epic designed to evoke identification with the figures' emotional states through its recourse to sentimental figuration.

61 Glenna Goodacre and Daniel R. Anthony, *Glenna Goodacre Sculpture* (Santa Fe: Encantado Press, 2009).

62 Philadelphia *Irish Memorial* website, http://www.irishmemorial.org/memorial.html.

63 Irish Memorial Inc., 'The Irish Memorial/Leacht Cuimhneacháin na nGael' (Philadelphia: Irish Memorial Inc., 2003), 12. This document was published and distributed to coincide with the memorial's unveiling.

64 http://www.irishmemorial.org/memorial.html

65 Irish Memorial Inc., 'The Irish Memorial,' 12.

Attempts to render the Famine figures as 'authentic'[66] were pursued through attention to costume detail and the reproduction of some poses taken from engravings in the *Illustrated London News*. Unlike Behan's work, both landscape and figures are conceived with an exaggerated realism that recalls nineteenth-century Romantic compositions, themselves dramatized vignettes of Irish eviction and Irish suffering emphasizing extremes of emotion and response. Goodacre described her own empathy with her subject during the sculptural process: 'When I was so tired and worn out, I'd look at the figure I call the Famine – torn, tired and hungry – and really identify.'[67] News reports on the memorial and Goodacre's own description of viewers' reactions to the piece repeatedly recalled extreme emotional reactions to the work and anthropomorphic readings of the figures themselves: 'they all came to see it, and it was very emotional […] men just walking around the original clay, just crying'.[68] The committee's president John Donovan remarked in interview how, on a rainy day, the sculptures themselves appear to weep.[69] The imaging of the Famine body intended to evince an empathetic response is by no means a new development, as discussed in Chapter 2; most depictions of the Irish poor from the mid-nineteenth century (whether graphically executed or painted as narrative) have similar intention. These representations (though often treated as factual source material by contemporary users) are themselves constructed imaginings to one degree or another; yet while their recourse to the sentimental can be interpreted as a conscious (if ultimately futile) avoidance of the political, the reverse is true of the Famine bodies populating Philadelphia's wharfside.

The title of the Philadelphia project, 'The Irish Memorial', reflects the erecting committee's goal to eradicate usage of the term 'famine' in the Irish context, preferring instead reference to 'The Irish Starvation' or 'The Great Hunger' in promotional and inscribed text. The education of viewers on the subject of English culpability for the Famine was an explicit aim of the monument carried through on the interpretative stations whose text focuses on English cruelty and oppression in the face of Irish helplessness, beginning with the sweeping indictment 'Ireland's Past – A Prelude to Disaster'. In an interview with the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, committee chairman Jim Coyne made his views on the Famine clear:

> How can the failure of one crop constitute a famine? […] There was no

66 Interview with Glenna Goodacre (Artist), 28 February 2007.
67 Joanne Ditmer, 'An Gorta Mor Massive Sculpture Takes Shape at Loveland Foundry.' *The Denver Post* (Denver), 14 March 2002.
68 Interview with Goodacre (2007).
69 Interview with Donovan (2005).

> scarcity of food; the country was still exporting food […] So it begs the question: Were the Irish stupid farmers? […] Were they so improvident that they couldn't handle the failure of a single crop? […] The English stole land from the Irish.[70]

Another interpretative panel at the site of the monument similarly asserts, 'Today a growing number of historians believe the term "famine," often used to describe the lack of food leading to this desolation, is totally inappropriate.' Goodacre recalled that during the preliminary modelling of the work committee members urged her to embody this message in her visual design where possible:

> One thing in that tableau that they tried to say, and they wanted me to say, but I couldn't figure out how, that the English were to blame for all of the starvation. There wasn't a famine, it was a starvation, and that the English starved the Irish. And they wanted somehow for me to get that in the expression on the faces […] they were disappointed that I couldn't say that more, though I cannot figure out how you do that in a figure.[71]

The notion that historic grievance might be embodied within sculptural form and emotionally revived by viewer response speaks to the committee's belief in the affective potential of public commemoration – here grounded not in abstracted renderings of 'universal' suffering (as with Behan's Mayo sculpture) but in a direct encounter with a verisimilitude of the Famine subject. The poem by Peter Quinn that appears as part of its inscription, entitled 'Remembrance', suggests that such personal 'relivings' of the Famine are inherent to the function and intention of the work:

> We have it in our power
> not only to remember
> what took place but to relive it …
> To find in the hungry and lost,
> not a different race …
> but the faces of our ancestors …
> An image of ourselves.

The call here to 'remember' comprises not simply an act of mental recall nor the expression of grief or loss, but the filling of absence, the re-membering of

70 Coyne, qtd. in Carey, 'In Sculpture, the Irish Saga.'
71 Interview with Goodacre (2007).

a scattered body into a familiar whole. The literal fashioning of a simulated Irish ancestor is designed to evoke an act of recognition between self and other, rejecting the strangeness of the past and seeing in it not an incomprehensible tragedy but 'an image of ourselves'. Of course, such a transaction is inevitably predicated on illusion, and is here resolved through recourse to ethnic stereotype and the creation of an odyssey of death, voyage and re-birth. Goodacre's figure studies from the memorial entitled 'Bridget' or 'Mr O'Toole' form latter-day incarnations of Erskine Nicol's paddies and praties; even if executed more sympathetically, the effect (and their commoditization[72]) is equally contrived.

On similar grounds, Philadelphia architectural critic Inga Saffron attacked Goodacre's approach to the memorial as 'simple-minded sentimentality', wondering why no one found such a design offensive during its development. She denounced the Philadelphia memorial as 'a Hallmark card transferred to bronze', hampered by its 'clumsy literalness' and the stereotypical props and costumes that transform the figures into 'cartoons', none of which is aided by the 'student-level quality of the modeling'.[73] Few other negative criticisms of the work have appeared, however, and its popular appeal indeed seems rooted in the extremes of public feeling the work aspires to evoke. Perhaps more than any other contemporary Famine memorial, it exemplifies Erika Doss' observations on the extraordinary dominance of a hyperrealized 'affective culture' shaping current memorial production in America.[74]

Famine historian Peter Gray has described the creation myth of Irish America as comprising 'shared memories of "the Famine" and "the crossing"' which 'gave a sense of collective ethnic solidarity to people drawn from a wide range of Irish localities, and provided the moral idea of strength through shared suffering'.[75] The adoption of the Famine passage as central to such forms of Irish American ethnic identity allows for a straightforward declaration of lineage, from Irish victim to American survivor, that appears in literal form in Goodacre's work, with the polarities of victimhood (more problematic in the Irish context) erased

72 Although many sculptors of public Famine projects have augmented their income selling small models or studies of monumental work, the Philadelphia project generated an especially wide range of expensive and diverse 'collectibles' based on the memorial, including the aforementioned Irish 'personalities' (listed at $6,500-8,000) and a set of three Celtic headstones for $15,000 (see http://www.galleriasilecchia.com).

73 Inga Saffron, 'Changing Skylines: Memorial a Blight on Irish Suffering.' *Philadelphia Enquirer* (Philadephia), 12 March 2004.

74 Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

75 Gray, 'Memory and Commemoration', 49.

here. Emotional attachment and identification with the faces, the 'image of ourselves', ultimately finds resolution in a celebration of national becoming, as echoed in the main dedication ('We celebrate the indefatigable spirit of the Irish that enabled them to triumph over tragedy') and a teleological affirmation of self structured through the linear narratives of sculpture, site and inscription.

Although the process of its construction and formal outcome suggest a deeply felt desire to connect with emigrant forebears and make visible this history to a wider audience (and to a lesser extent, acknowledge links to recent immigration[76]), its brand of emotional nostalgia harkens back to Victorian depictions of the Famine, ultimately privileging the indulgence of feeling over other avenues of response. With little notice paid to a sense of its own historical moment and by presenting a static, arrested narrative within a nineteenth-century artistic language, the Philadelphia memorial functions less as dynamic artwork than as paean to ethnic origins. The *National Famine Memorial* in Mayo likewise operates outside the idiom of aesthetically innovative contemporary memorials, and retains familiar, committee-friendly features: monumental in scale, bronze, representational and accessible. However, the Mayo memorial resonates far more powerfully in its allusive reference to the western Irish landscape and Croagh Patrick, and a relationship to site that is more organic than ossified. It more readily navigates the troublesome balance between monumentality and the commemoration of despondency – even if it, too, lacks consciousness of the polysemous nature of Famine memory in its reliance on the coffin ship and Atlantic passage as icon of the Irish Famine experience. Nevertheless, like many Irish memorials, its starkness of imagery and centring of loss and grief do greater justice to the difficult subject than a ceremonial bowl of shamrocks could ever achieve.

Sydney

Over the past two decades the rapid global proliferation of 'museums of migration' and the redevelopment of sites of immigrant heritage has paralleled the resurgence of interest in commemorating the Irish Famine.[77]

76 The final narrative station ('Lessons of The Great Hunger') features a photograph of a multi-ethnic group of children and notes 'We must be mindful that prejudice still exists, especially toward newly arrived immigrants […] To them we say in greeting: "Céad mile fáilte!" One hundred thousand welcomes!'

77 In 2006 the growth of this museum sector prompted the launch of a 'Network of Migration Museums' by UNESCO and IOM (International Organization for Migration), whose membership now draws in thirty-three institutions (nearly all less

Yet, as battered suitcases, cracked china and yellowing letters to loved ones housed in expensive display cases become increasingly familiar sights, it is easy to forget the recent vintage of much immigration museology: in North America the opening of Ellis Island's Immigration Museum to great fanfare in 1990 was followed by New York's Lower East Side Tenement Museum in 1994, Pier 21 in Nova Scotia in 1999 (designated in 2009 as the Canadian 'National Museum of Immigration'), and the (now-closed) Dreams of Freedom Boston Immigration Museum in 2000. As with the redevelopment of Grosse Île in Quebéc during the 1990s, most of these initiatives clustered along the eastern seaboard accompanied the restoration of historic buildings that played important roles in the processing and sheltering of immigrants during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In Australia, a nation unsurpassed in its debt to the legacy of migration, similar efforts saw the opening of Melbourne's sophisticated Immigration Museum in 1998, and earlier, with the 1986 founding of the Migration Museum of Adelaide, and the 1990 restoration of Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT). The augmented cultural value of Hyde Park Barracks within Australia's heritage landscape owes much to changed attitudes towards the nation's origins as a penal colony.[78] As the first convict barracks in New South Wales (built in 1819), the site has been subject to extensive archaeological excavation and now houses a series of permanent and changing exhibitions which focus on the history of male convict transportation and later female immigration to New South Wales. In 1998 the Barracks received a further addition to its built fabric in the form of the *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine* (Fig 6.5), realized through a collaboration between the HHT and the Irish Famine Commemoration Committee made up from representatives of Sydney's Irish community.

The story of Irish immigration to Australia resists incorporation into a unified global diasporic narrative.[79] Lagging far behind Britain, America and Canada, only one twentieth of all Irish emigrants in the nineteenth

than fifteen years old) across Europe, North and South America, Australia and the Middle East.

78 Grace Karskens, 'Banished and Reclaimed: Grace Karskens Examines Representations of Australia's Convict Heritage at the Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Sydney.' *Meanjin* December, vol. 60, no. 4 (2001): 26–34. Robert Hughes' 1986 bestseller on the subject also did much to revive popular interest in the subject: Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868* (New York City: Knopf, 1986).

79 Richard E. Reid, *Farewell My Children: Irish Assisted Emigration to Australia 1848-1870* (Spit Junction, New South Wales: Anchor Books Australia, 2011); Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1987), 5–21; Oliver MacDonagh, 'Emigration from Ireland to Australia: An Overview.' In *Australia and*

century made the long journey to Australia, a significant number of these through various convict transportation schemes, with much higher levels of emigration occurring post-1850 as a response to favourable economic prospects than as a result of panicked exodus from Famine conditions.[80] Yet, as Oliver MacDonagh has noted, if emigration from Ireland to Australia had comparatively little impact on the home country, its proportional impact on Australia (when compared to America or England) was enormous, with the Irish forming nearly 25% of total immigrants from 1788.[81] Broadly speaking, Irish emigrants seeking to integrate into Australian society encountered fewer obstacles than those which embittered generations of Irish Americans; though still a minority population, the Irish came to play a principal, not peripheral role in shaping a nascent sense of Australian identity.[82] Thus the central positing of the Famine exodus as fundamental to Irish American or Irish Canadian identity by later generations finds little parallel in Australia; in the absence of sweeping narratives compelling their monumentalization, Famine commemorations in Australia have focused instead on more contained and localized histories, whose significance (if not scope) relates as closely to Australia's wider immigrant heritage as it does to a narrow ethnic Irish determinism. Melbourne's 'Famine Rock' erected in 1998 offers evidence of these layered influences, as a modest memorial making reference to Ireland's Famine dead, emigrants to the Melbourne area and the indigenous Aboriginal population of the area dispossessed as a consequence of European settlement.[83]

In 1995 Mary Robinson's visit to Sydney sparked interest in the idea of marking the Famine anniversary through the construction of a major memorial in the city. The Irish Communications Council (an umbrella organization linking multiple smaller county associations) formed a

Ireland: Bicentenary Essays, ed. Colm Kiernan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 121–37.

80 David Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Emigration to Nineteenth-Century Australia.' In *Australia and Ireland: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Colm Kiernan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 138–44.

81 MacDonagh, 'Emigration from Ireland to Australia,' 124.

82 The book responsible for reviving much of the popular interest in the Irish influence in Australia was Thomas Keneally's *The Great Shame* (1998); today the term 'Anglo-Celtic' is frequently used to describe Australia's white European majority heritage.

83 Part of the memorial's inscription reads 'In sorrow for the dispossession of the Bunurong and Woiworung people but in a spirit of reconciliation. In solidarity with all those who suffer hunger today.' Information on the Melbourne project (and a visit to same) was facilitated by committee chairman Val Noone. See also Val Noone, 'The Relevance of the Famine to Australians Today.' In *Australian Commemoration of the Great Irish Famine*, ed. Jarlath Ronayne and Val Noone (Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney: Victoria University, 1996).

commemorative sub-committee and in 1996 elected Tom Power (then president of the Tipperary Association) chairman of the Great Irish Famine Memorial Appeal.[84] In 1996 the committee commissioned five artists to create proposals for a figurative monument with a project budget of AUS$35,000, which they subsequently presented to the Trustees of the Historic Houses of NSW. At the time, several sites had been considered for a possible monument, but the group favoured Hyde Park Barracks as the optimal location. Unfortunately for the committee, the designs submitted were unequivocally rejected by the HHT. Recalling the process, curator Michael Bogle noted that any memorial 'had to be of quality, resonance and sophistication that matches the work we do' at the Barracks.[85] The figurative memorials proposed did not fit these requirements and were considered inappropriate for the site. The cautious outlook of the HHT was reflected in director Peter Watts' description of the proposed monument as 'a huge challenge. The Barracks in Sydney is imbued with so much of this nation's history that it has almost sacred status in the minds of many Australians. As the custodians of this place we do not add to it lightly.'[86] Despite rejecting these initial designs, the HHT agreed to assist the memorial committee in developing a suitable monument for the Hyde Park Barracks site. As Power noted, 'we were on a very sharp learning curve.'[87] Along with fellow Irish community representative Martin Coleman, he joined a newly formed sculpture committee that included HHT trustees, curators and experts in public art to develop a new brief for the project.

Key to the formation of the brief was the decision to base the new memorial on the experience of Famine-era female migration from Ireland to Australia, an episode unique in Irish Australian migration history.[88] From 1848 to 1850

84 Details of the committee and the process of building the memorial provided in interview with Tom Power (Chairman, Sydney Great Irish Famine Memorial Appeal), 13 and 17 March 2006.

85 Interview with Michael Bogle (Former curator of Hyde Park Barracks Museum), 27 March 2006. The Barracks' innovative approach to interpretation and display combines traditional object cases and interpretative text panels with contemporary art installations (permanent and temporary) and extensive reflections on the transformation of the site to a museum and the processes of historical and archaeological research undergirding the current displays.

86 Joanna Gilmour and Michael Bogle, *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine* (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 2001), Foreword.

87 Interview with Power (2006).

88 See Chapter 6, 'The Removal of Mendacity from One Soil to Another': Destitute Irish who Received an Assisted Passage", in Reid, *Farewell My Children*, 140–71; Trevor McClaughlin, *Barefoot and Pregnant? Irish Famine Orphans in Australia*, 2 vols. (Melbourne: The Geneaological Society of Victoria, 1991, 2001); Richard Reid and Cheryl Mongan, *'A Decent Set of Girls...': The Irish Famine Orphans of the Thomas Arbuthnot, 1849–50* (Yass: Yaas Heritage Project, 1996).

over 4,000 orphan girls were sent to Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne from Irish workhouses as part of Earl Grey's assisted emigration scheme; Hyde Park Barracks processed and housed the young women until employment could be found for them. Public hostility to Earl Grey's concomitant efforts to reinstitute transportation to New South Wales and lurid accusations of the orphans' immorality and dubious moral character occasioned a public outcry and the scheme was short-lived, though the Barracks continued to serve as an immigration depot for subsequent 'unprotected' female assisted migrants until 1886.

Reflecting on this history, the new brief for the Famine commemoration (budgeted at $150-200,000) issued in July 1997 instructed that 'The sculptural installation should symbolise the poignant experiences of the forced migration of young Irish women [...] The central themes of the sculpture are hunger and forced immigration with particular reference to the suffering of Irish women, but also their survival and achievement in a new land.'[89] Further language plainly sought to discourage the submission of independent figurative statues in response to the brief:

> The commemorative sculpture introduced into this historic precinct should not be an isolated artwork installed as an embellishment to the site but should interact with the architectural design and symbolism of the Barracks.[90]

In the process of revising the brief the HHT committee had narrowed the choice of site to the southern wall enclosing the Barracks, a structure linked also to the neighbouring Land Titles Office and built in the 1950s.[91] The brief further requested that artists consider the 'cultural integrity' of the site, but suggested the possibility that architectural interventions might be made:

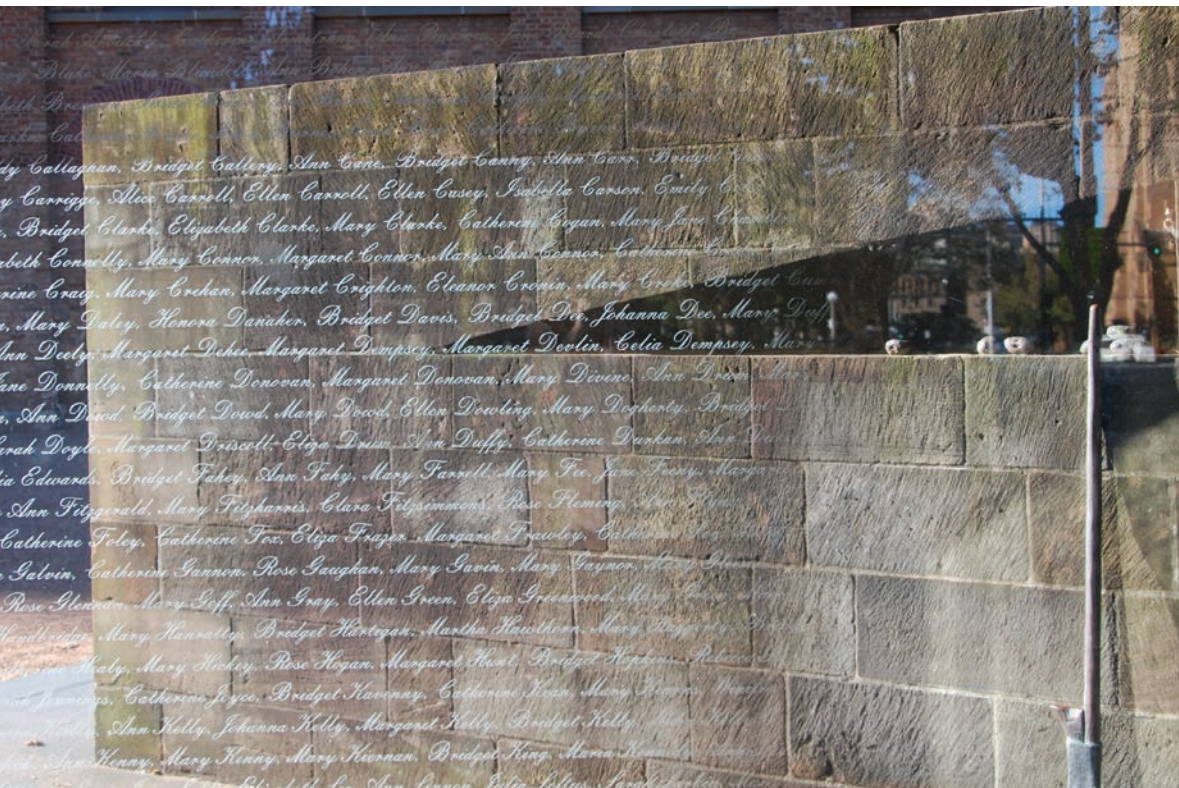
> [...] a work that maintains the enclosure of the Barracks Yard is required, but it is possible that an installation could pierce, remove

89 Great Famine Commemoration Committee and Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 'The Great Irish Famine Commemoration Sculpture Project Brief' (Provided by Tom Power, dated July 1997), unpaginated.

90 Ibid.

91 Initially a public square adjacent to the Barracks, already containing two statues of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, was also considered. According to Power, some members of the sculpture committee were rather insistent that this juxtaposition might politicize the memorial, and it was dropped as a possibility: Interview with Power (2006).

Figure 6.5 *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine*, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh (1999)
Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in collaboration with the the Irish Famine Commemoration Committee


Callaghan, Bridget Callery, Ann Cane, Bridget Canny, Ann Carr,
Carrigge, Alice Carroll, Ellen Carroll, Ellen Cusey, Isabella Carson,
Bridget Clarke, Elizabeth Clarke, Mary Clarke, Catherine Cogan,
Connolly, Mary Connor, Margaret Connor, Mary Ann Connor,
Craig, Mary Crehan, Margaret Crighton, Eleanor Cronin, Mary Cro
Daley, Honora Danaher, Bridget Davis, Bridget Dee, Johanna Dee,
Deely, Margaret Dehie, Margaret Dempsey, Margaret Devlin, Celia Dempsey,
Donnelly, Catherine Donovan, Margaret Donovan, Mary Devine,
Bridget Dowd, Mary Dowd, Ellen Dowling, Mary Dogherty,
Margaret Driscoll-Eliza Drum, Ann Duffy, Catherine Dunkan,
Bridget Fahey, Ann Fahy, Mary Farrell, Mary Fee,
Ann Fitzgerald, Mary Fitzharris, Clara Fitzsimmons, Rose Fleming,
Catherine Foley, Catherine Fox, Eliza Frazer, Margaret Frawley,
Galvin, Catherine Gannon, Rose Gaughan, Mary Gavin, Mary Gaynor,
Rose Glennon, Mary Goff, Ann Gray, Ellen Green, Eliza Greenwood,
Mary Hannahy, Bridget Hanlegan, Martha Hawthorn,
Haly, Mary Hickey, Rose Hogan, Margaret Hunt, Bridget Hopkins,
Catherine Joyce, Bridget Kaveanny, Catherine Kean, Mary
Ann Kelly, Johanna Kelly, Margaret Kelly, Bridget Kelly,
Kenny, Mary Kenny, Mary Kiernan, Bridget King, Maria

> or modify the wall […] a ground level installation or sculpture may incorporate water, light and sound components.[92]

In the meantime, the Irish community committee's project budget had grown alongside their ambition, eventually meeting the final bill of the memorial project ($350,000) through private fundraising and donations from the state government (orchestrated by New South Wales Premier Bob Carr), the Commonwealth government of Australia (negotiated via appeals to the government's political opposition and Irish ambassador Richard O'Brien), the Irish government, the City of Sydney and the Land Titles Office. Forty-three proposals were received in response to the call for submissions advertised in the national press in 1997.[93] Five artists (all Australian) were eventually shortlisted and each given $1,000 to develop their proposal and create maquettes; finally, the husband and wife team of Hossein and Angela Valamanesh were formally awarded the commission by the Historic Houses Trust. Power described the five finalists: 'We allowed one of the five in as a figurative, two similar to Valamanesh's, and then two that were considered too abstract, way out. And of course Valamanesh was in the middle. He was a balance between the ultra-modern and the conservative.'[94] Power's concern during the selection process stemmed from his role as representative of the Irish community who he feared would reject too abstruse a design:

> We were looking for a figurative memorial, even if it was of an orphan girl, we wanted a figurative one […] We were saying that if we give any other kind of a monument to the Irish people they will reject it […] I knew that with twelve committee members there would be some disagreements.[95]

Nevertheless, the decidedly non-figurative memorial was inaugurated on 2 September 1998 by Mary McAleese and finally unveiled on 28 August 1999.

As occasional partners on public art commissions, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh's collaboration on the *Australian Monument to the Great Irish*

92 Great Famine Commemoration Committee and Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 'The Great Irish Famine Commemoration Sculpture Project Brief.'

93 Power noted in interview that despite the language of the brief some traditional figurative proposals were nevertheless received, including what he described as 'statues of ladies dressed in rags, the usual, the stereotype […] like the Boston memorial, and I'd known about Fintan O'Toole [referring to O'Toole's article criticizing the Boston work]. So I thought I'd try and avoid that.' Interview with Power (2006).

94 Interview with Power (2006). Images of the other finalists' designs (Alison Clouston, Maria Kuczynska, Louis Laumen and Debra Phillips) appear in Gilmour and Bogle, *Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine*.

95 Interview with Power (2006).

Famine bears witness to the overlapping interests of each as expressed through their individual art practices. A native of South Australia, Angela Valamanesh's ceramic works consist of experiments in subtle modulations of form, surface and muted colour, punctuated by occasional forays into sculptural installation (including *Birds Have Fled,* 1995 and *Calculations*, 1996) which rely on slight distortions of proportion and space to enigmatic effect; interest in the ebb and flow of memory and its residues suffuse other work (*In Remembrance of Things*, 1996 and *Been Here and Gone,* 2005).[96] Iranian-born Hossein Valamanesh emigrated to Australia in 1973 where his work combining sculpture, installation and photography has been widely exhibited and published.[97] Inflected by *arte povera*'s minimalism and preference for impermanent and natural materials, Valamanesh's work functions as a kind of connective tissue linking place and memory. Works like *Daily Bread* (1995) and *Longing Belonging* (1997) delve into childhood memory and a sense of cultural dislocation; others layer notions of self and being through images of the artist's fingerprints cut into landscape (*Earthwork,* 1981); and previous public works like *Dwelling* (1980) and *Knocking From the Inside* (1988) create intriguing, theatrical forms and settings inviting viewer curiosity and contemplative reflection.[98]

Together, the Valamaneshes' works share a refinement of form, careful attention to balance and proportion, materials connected to folk and tradition, and an interest in memory and its poetic evocation; their combined public work has also been described as 'accessible'[99] and responsive to the presence of the viewer. In approaching the Famine project both artists emphasized their view of the memorial as an artwork in its own right:

> We were making a historic monument as such, but we wanted it to be a piece of sculpture. Of course it's a memorial to the Famine, but we wanted it to have sculptural qualities. (A.V.)

96 Angus Trumble, *Angela Valamanesh: Selected Works 1993-2002* (Adelaide: Greenaway Art Gallery, 2002); Catherine Kenneally, *Angela Valamanesh: About Being Here* (Kent Town, S. Aust.: Wakefield Press, 2009).

97 Paul Carter, *Hossein Valamanesh* (Roseville: Art & Australia Monographs, 1996); John Neylon, *Natural Selection: Hossein Valamanesh* (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2003); Ivor Indyk, 'Hossein Valamanesh' (Sydney: Sherman Galleries, 2006); Mary Knights and Ian North, *Hossein Valamanesh: Out of Nothingness* (Kent Town, S. Aust: Wakefield Press, 2011).

98 Hossein Valamanesh, 'Hossein Valamanesh.' In *Cardinal Points: Mapping Adelaide's Diversity – People, Places, Points of View*, ed. Malcolm Walker (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2001), 14–16.

99 Marian Pastor Roces, 'Hossein Valamanesh: Locating Politics.' *Art Monthly Australia* October, no. 144 (2001): 25–8.

> [we looked at …] how an artwork can remember something, rather than to give a symbolic presence to aspirations of the Irish people here. Although they were the ones for whom the piece was done, we were offering them an artwork […] In that sense, it wasn't really dictated by the community or their aspiration, but in the end they seem to have taken it to heart. (H.V.)[100]

Their winning design for Sydney's Famine memorial extends such interests in the subtle disturbance of urban space in the service of revealing an occluded history, centred at the site of the Barracks' southern wall. After dismantling the wall, a central section was rotated and rebuilt at an angle, creating a new sequence of spaces and perspectives in both the Barracks' courtyard (interior) and the public street (exterior). A table cast in bronze is bisected by the wall, each end set with a small three-legged stool and a single dish (also cast in bronze). Representing the two halves of emigrant girls' experience, the bowl on the exterior street side is a void that cuts through the table, symbolizing hunger and emptiness. Nearby a loy (spade) modelled in bronze leans against an adjacent niche cut into the wall occupied by bronze models of a few shrivelled potatoes. On the interior side of the courtyard the bowl and table are slightly enlarged and more institutional in form; the stool is marked with impressions of buttons and sewing implements which came from the museum's archaeological excavations, found under the floorboards of the Barracks. Niches in the corners of the wall contain cast bronze books and a sewing basket – in the artists' view, symbolic objects representing the meagre possessions of the orphan girls and the portable reminders of home they might have carried with them to Australia.

The opening created by the rotation of the wall is closed off again via two panels of glass, engraved with a partial list of the names of orphan girls housed in the Barracks.[101] Initially, the more than 400 names appear clearly inscribed before fading as the gaze travels from left to right, representing the ephemerality and vagaries of memory, as well as the unrecoverable history of many of the orphan girls. While the panes of glass solved the security problem engendered by the piercing of the wall, they also function as temporal and spatial devices slowing down viewer engagement:

> The rotated sandstone wall represents disruption & dislocation. While its rotation results in a gap which provides the viewer with a degree of visual accessibility to both sides of the art work, the effect of the

100 Interview with Hossein Valamanesh and Angela Valamanesh (Artists), 22 March 2006.

101 The list of names was compiled by Tom Power and Trevor McLaughlin following successful efforts to contact descendants of the orphan girls.

> observer being unable to walk through or view the work in its totality is maintained. The viewer is obliged to rely on memory in order to complete the image and make it whole.[102]

Outside of the Barracks' opening hours only half of the memorial remains publicly accessible, implicitly recalling the strict segregation of the girls during their stay at the Barracks, and the perceptions of many local residents of the girls as 'other' amongst Sydney civil society. In interview the Valamaneshes described the importance of scale to the work, choosing to shorten the height of the rotated wall and introducing the table as an element to suggest domesticity, the social levelling of individuals sitting down together in the shared act of a meal, and the eventual employment of many girls as domestic servants across Australia. Small apertures cut into the exterior of the wall allow the viewer to peer at the vista of the Barracks beyond, replicating the spyholes incorporated into the dormitory doors that allowed surveillance of occupants (first convicts, then immigrant women). Akin to much of the Valamaneshes' individual work, the memorial's aesthetic is restrained, itinerant and open to viewer association and reference, in spite of its direct engagement with the historical fabric of the Barracks. Despite its use of monumental materials (glass, stone, bronze) as opposed to the natural materials more typical of their work, the degree of finish and spare arrangement of forms lend the work similar sculptural presence and heft. Nonetheless, the artists have been pleased with the tendency of the memorial to recede from public attention, noting that 'many passers-by don't seem to notice the work at all, until a realization of the disjointment occurs and the work "looks like it just happened"'.[103]

A balance between the legible and the enigmatic is carefully controlled. Both artists in interview articulated their desire to leave the work open to viewer interpretation: 'We didn't want to make it too obvious that everyone would say, "Oh, this is a memorial to the Famine"' (A.V.) 'You have to make up your own mind as to what happened and what is the true story. For us just to interpret the historical reality of that time would have been very presumptuous.' (H.V.)[104] These goals grounded in ambiguity came into some conflict with the commemorative preferences of Power, who was pleased with the memorial but dissatisfied with the low visibility of the interpretative plaques that other committee members like Michael Bogle 'fought like the devil'[105] to keep away. Additionally, despite Power's personal and evident

102 Artists' statement, http://www.irishfaminememorial.org/monument/artists.htm.
103 Interview with Valamanesh and Valamanesh (2006).
104 Interview with Valamanesh and Valamanesh (2006).
105 Interview with Bogle (2006).

enthusiasm for the final design, he initially faced a considerable challenge bringing Irish community supporters over to his point of view:

> I had to try and persuade the Irish community that it was an outstanding design, because they weren't expecting that. It was – what would you call it? – kind of postmodern [...] It wasn't easy. Even some members of the committee weren't happy about it. They couldn't see anything much in it. But after some persuasion, they all went back to their various groups and said this is it. I went on radio, community radio, explaining it to them and what it meant [...] the ambassador, a very articulate gentleman, very persuasive, got behind it. When he got behind it I think a lot of the Irish community got behind it as well.[106]

As part of the project the Valamaneshes commissioned writer and artist Paul Carter to create a soundscape, 'Out of their Feeling', to be installed in the courtyard's lone lilli pilli tree at a cost of $25,000. Female voices sing and speak, meant to relate to the marginalization of feminine/Irish voices, but unfortunately the track can barely be heard over the din of nearby traffic and the addition of the sound feels tacked-on, poorly integrated and distracting. Dismayed by the cost and effect produced, Tom Power has noted that few visitors seem to notice it, nor does he believe it holds much appeal for the Irish community generally.[107] Michael Bogle agreed on this point, citing his frustration with the breakdown of equipment and complaints from nearby offices over the looped sound.[108]

Generally, however, response to the memorial has been extremely positive, with favourable reviews in the general media and art press.[109] The memorial remains the only permanent Irish interpretative piece on site at Hyde Park Barracks, its significance kept alive through incorporation into museum tours and interpretative material and most especially through the ongoing efforts of Power and a new generation of managing committee based in the Irish community. The committee sponsors an annual 'Gathering' at which descendants of the orphan girls continue to meet at the memorial for a service of remembrance, and a series of scholarships supporting both academic research on migration and the education of a recently arrived female refugee to honour the legacy of the migrant women. Other related initiatives include the establishment of a foundation to support a programme

106 Interview with Power (2006).
107 Interview with Power (2006)
108 Interview with Bogle (2006).
109 Siobhan McHugh, 'Orphans of the Famine (Part 1).' *The Irish Times*, 28 August 1998; Deborah Hart, 'Ways of Remembering.' *Art & Australia* 38, no. 2 (2000): 231–3; John Neylon, 'Doubleact.' *The Adelaide Review* (Adelaide), January 2003.

for the education of refugees at a facility west of Sydney (run by the Sisters of Mercy); and perhaps most visibly, the monument has become a key stop for visiting Irish dignitaries, sports teams and other delegations. Perhaps no better illustration of the memorial's new role as a site of Irish Australian communion can be found than the 2006 Christmas Eve mass broadcast from RTÉ at the site of the memorial which saw an audience over 3,000 in attendance, dressed now not in barracks-issued clothing, but GAA county colours and all shades of shamrockery, and communicating via text message to their friends and relatives stretched across the global Irish diaspora.

New York City

Over the past decade, the site of the former World Trade Center in New York City – bordered by Liberty Street to the south and Vesey Street to the north – has been subject to the most extensive, divisive and complex process of commemoration in American history. The shock to the national psyche and the physical devastation wrought on Lower Manhattan has irrevocably changed the public's relationship to acts of commemoration within this geography. What was formerly a rather sterile financial district has been catapulted into the canon of sacred American spaces, and all subsequent memorial projects in the area are destined to lie in the shadow of the twin towers and the industry of commemoration that has sprung up in their absence.

Yet on the morning of 11 September 2001, a few blocks from the WTC down Vesey Street, another memorial construction – itself a commemoration of death and cataclysmic events – was busily underway (Fig. 6.6). Standing on an elevated patch of earth amidst the skyscrapers of Battery Park City, artist Brian Tolle was supervising the installation of the largest, most expensive and complex Famine memorial constructed to date when he witnessed the first plane hit the north tower. Work was suspended on the memorial for several weeks; although little damage was sustained and the monument was eventually unveiled only a few weeks behind schedule, the profound impact of 9/11 remains imprinted on the memorial's environment and reception, and layered into the physical form itself, as debris and remains from the collapsed towers now lie integrated into the soil of the finished monument. Echoed in the comments of dignitaries present at its unveiling was a sharp sense of the cycles of history, of tragic death and suffering, and of the responsibility of memorial guardianship felt by those present. It is impossible to know what the profile of the New York *Irish Hunger Memorial* would have been had 9/11 not taken place, and the dynamics of meaning between them continue to evolve as Ground Zero's own commemorative programme takes final

shape. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the history of Famine commemoration, Tolle's monument offers the most intriguing and multi-layered engagement with Famine memory yet attempted, whose preoccupations with how the Famine can (or should) be represented and remembered in contemporary New York interrogates equally the subject, ellipses and impulses of remembrance.

The *Irish Hunger Memorial* unveiled on 16 July 2002 was sponsored and built by Battery Park City Authority (BPCA) at a cost of $5 million. Former BPCA Chairman James Gill described the project as the brainchild of New York State Governor George Pataki, who brought the idea to Gill and BPCA President/CEO Tim Carey. All three men identify strongly with their Irish American backgrounds and viewed the memorial as a highly personal initiative.[110] The executive committee formed to oversee the memorial included Governor Pataki's mother, Margaret Pataki (a native of County Louth), and Cardinal John O'Connor, along with high-profile Irish American political and business figures; the steering committee which directed the competition and installation drew wider representation from government, public art and architectural bodies. The relative financial autonomy of BPCA and enthusiasm of three senior figures in leadership positions resulted in a remarkably quick gestation, development and construction period, with the memorial commissioned in March 2000 and unveiled in July 2002. As a consequence of the BPCA's assumption of total financial responsibility, the role of the executive board was largely honorary and the memorial project completed with little conflict or controversy.

One hundred and fifty proposals were received through an invited competition, with five finalists selected and given $10,000 each to fully develop their proposals. The open project brief requested that a contemplative space be created reflecting on the theme of Irish hunger, making use of the harbour view and incorporating some textual component. In 2000 artist Brian Tolle was awarded the commission in tandem with his proposal partners 1100 Architects (Juergen Riehm and David Piscuskas) and landscape architect Gail Eileen Wittwer-Laird. Tolle's research into the Famine was supported by historian Maureen Murphy, developer of the New York State Famine curriculum, and his design largely inspired after an encounter with the rugged landscape of Slievemore on Achill Island, dotted with the roofless remains of abandoned nineteenth-century cottages.

Tolle's proposal included plans for the construction of a ¼ acre tilted section of Irish landscape, cantilevered and elevated by a large undulating beamed concrete support and a base clad in Kilkenny limestone. The upper

110 Information about BPCA's management of the memorial process was provided in interview with James A. Gill (Chairman, Battery Park City Authority), 16 March 2004.

Figure 6.6 *Irish Hunger Memorial*, Brian Tolle (artist)/Gail Eileen Wittwer-Laird (landscape)/1100 Architects (architects), New York, New York (2002). Battery Park City Authority
Photograph courtesy of Brian Tolle Studio

Figure 6.6 *Irish Hunger Memorial*, Brian Tolle (artist)/Gail Eileen Wittwer-Laird (landscape)/1100 Architects (architects), New York, New York (2002). Battery Park City Authority

landscape includes a recreated Irish field planted with dozens of native Irish flora, a row of potato furrows, and anchored by a roofless stone cottage transplanted from Ireland. The lower half of the memorial layers bands of greenish fossilised limestone with illuminated lines of text set behind glass, wrapping around the entire base of the memorial. The viewer enters either from the eastern landscape side (connecting to street level) or by way of a passage on the western riverside edge of the memorial, its entrance 25 feet below the projecting edge of the landscape above. This passage, lined with glowing text panels and featuring an audio track, leads the viewer though a progressively narrowed entrance before emerging into the exposed space of the cottage and following it through into the upper landscape. Upon ascending to the top of the memorial the viewer may take in views of the East River and the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island in the distance.

In interview Tolle described the work as a 'memorial turned upside-down', a monument driven not by aesthetics but by concept.[111] Previous works in Tolle's oeuvre comprise similar conceptual exercises in questioning monumentality, authenticity, nostalgia and place. One of his first pieces, *Declaration of Independence Desk: Thomas Jefferson* (1994) reproduced the desk on which Jefferson reputedly drafted the Declaration that has since made its way into the collection of the Smithsonian, reflecting on the monumental and relic value acquired by the desk over time. Concurrent with the *Irish Hunger Memorial*, Tolle's work *Waylay* (2002) appeared in Central Park as part of the Whitney Biennial, installing a system underneath the water of Bow Bridge to create a series of random, unexpected splashes: '[it was] this idea of how I could use the park as raw material [...] it was a very, very subtle intervention [...] Was it just some natural phenomena, or was it some kind of manipulation?'[112] His most recent solo exhibition in 2009 created façades of model homes constructed as part of the Levittown planned community in Pennsylvania out of flexible urethanes, playfully merging suburban nostalgia, pop hyperrealism and the transience of place.

With much of his previous work engaged with reinterpreting and deconstructing specific historical events, narratives and objects, Tolle inverts traditional monumental hierarchies by repositioning the viewer as the central agent (or medium) of remembrance. The cottage, the landscape and the layers of text of the *Irish Hunger Memorial* all combine to form a memorial object and experience which challenges viewer expectations of the real, notions of the monumental and memories of the past:

111 Interview with Brian Tolle (Artist), 18 March 2004. My thanks to Tolle for facilitating many subsequent visits to the monument as it has evolved over the past decade.

112 Interview with Tolle (2004).

> The idea that Irish Americans, having collectively constructed this very romantic picture of their past – to present to them this very literal thing – and I do mean *present* – that this *is* it. It's reconstructed, but this is what we're talking about. It wasn't just about a projection, it was about being able to make contact with something real.

Tolle's research into Irish history sparked an interest in the 'subterranean mythology' of the passage tomb or cairn that inspired the monument's dramatic entrance and centrality of the cottage structure:

> The idea is that it's being used as a threshold in a way. The house is a kind of portal, it's the mediating place, the lantern at the end of the court cairn where the light comes through and the place where you are drawn. Coming in under that cantilever, it's like the weight of history: you feel the compression, it's an enormous amount of weight. It's impossible not to feel somewhat anxious about being underneath that thing. Then you come into a passage that basically changes its proportion from being a very tall, narrow opening to very short and horizontal, almost like a cinematic frame.[113]

The reconstructed stone cottage imported from Ireland forms the monument's most memorable feature, a relic of Famine Ireland whose presence intentionally jars with its incongruous urban setting. During the search for a cottage to fit the memorial's design, Tolle's partner Brian Clyne recalled seeing such a structure on his cousins Chris and Tom Slack's farm in Attymass, Co. Mayo, and subsequently negotiated the gift of the cottage to the project.[114] Besides conveniently matching the footprint already on the plans of the memorial, the nineteenth-century cottage's connection to the Irish and American branches of Clyne's family (and the family's own emigrant story) meant the gift 'went from being an extraordinary thing to being a very modest thing – from this grand gesture to a very intimate gesture'.[115] On a more pragmatic note the cottage was carefully dismantled and its stones power-washed to avoid foot and mouth contamination before being allowed entry into the United States,[116] its

113 Interview with Tolle (2004).

114 Tolle retained the gaping holes in the side of the structure that were made during its use for livestock, a reminder of its continued use in contemporary times. As a reciprocal gesture, the former site of the cottage was itself commemorated with a stone memorial in Attymass in 2004.

115 Interview with Tolle (2004).

116 Yvonne Moran, 'Taking Mayo to Manhattan: The Newest Building in New York's Battery Park City will also be the Oldest – and it's Irish.' *The Irish Times*, 1 September 2001.

original rubble core also replaced by concrete to comply with NYC building and seismic codes.[117]

Tolle's transplantation of the roofless cottage sought to evoke the sense of absence, fortitude, loss and futility that affected him powerfully during his visit to Slievemore on Achill.[118] As with the soup pots prized in Carrick-on-Shannon or the quaystones encircling Buffalo's memorial, the cottage's status as authentic relic (materially and chronologically 'genuine') foregrounds a common reading of the Famine past as embedded in such traces of abjection and privation, whilst also obliquely referencing the fetishization of land and residues of artefactual history common to heritage reconstructions.[119] The ruined Irish cottage as an emblem of poverty, despair and displacement has long held special place in the visual vocabulary of the Famine, whether the subject of an *Illustrated London News* engraving, reconstructed heritage attraction or the common basis for Famine memorialization, yet, as Robin Lydenberg notes, 'this dislocation is not a disruption of the scene, but its very condition writ large.'[120] Another layer of engagement is facilitated by the viewer's ability to walk through the cottage and explore variations of scale and presence, or to marvel at the process of its shipment and reconstruction – a new version of the technological sublime. Yet its ultimate artificiality is inescapable: its stones are too clean, the floor surface too smoothly paved, and the overgrowth obviously deliberate. Its insertion amongst the skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan seeks to disturb as well as emote, as contrasts of modern and archaic materials, and wealth and poverty, accompany the romantic resonances also explicitly recalled. The recreated landscape surrounding the cottage flits across similar registers of the sentimental and surreal. Landscape here is treated sculpturally, a surface superficially similar to the parks and public spaces also maintained by the BPCA but whose elevation and unusual vegetation mark out its unnaturalness. The planting of the landscape overseen by Wittwer-Laird incorporates sixty-two different varieties, including blackthorn, gorse and heather, intended to overgrow

117 David W. Dunlap, 'Worn Down and Irish, and Moving Over Here.' *The New York Times*, 30 May 2001; Lorna Siggins, 'Co Mayo Famine House to be Rebuilt in U.S.' *The Irish Times*, 2 June 2001. The exact slope of the memorial was further determined by ADA (American Disability Act) requirements to allow for wheelchair access.

118 Interview with Tolle (2004).

119 As in many other Famine memorial projects, the precise Irish origin of the stone was heavily emphasized by the artist and project managers, with Kilkenny stone utilized in the paving and base, Mayo stone used in the house and Clare stone used for the wall structures.

120 Robin Lydenberg, 'From Icon to Index,' 127–34. See also Niamh Ann Kelly, 'Remembering Homelessness in the Great Irish Famine.' In *Ireland's Great Hunger: Relief, Representation, and Remembrance*, ed. David Valone (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), 140–60.

and resemble the wild, uncultivated Irish countryside. Here the monument consists not of a structure in the landscape, but of that very land itself: a literal (re)presentation for our attention of the material at the root of a turbulent history, or as Lydenberg has described it, an 'indexical' landscape gesturing beyond itself as 'process rather than fixed object or sign'.[121]

More precisely, the quarter-acre size of the planted area of the monument connects historically to the infamous Gregory clause of 1847, which denied relief to individuals holding more than a quarter-acre of land. The use of landscape as an active agent of memory further relates this 'urban tumulus' to universal concepts of death, burial and a return to the earth: as Simon Schama noted in his review of the memorial, 'We all seem wired to grieve with greenery.'[122] Yet the 'authentic' look of the landscape clashes with the mechanics of its preservation, as the plantings must be maintained via an external genebank of all species present on the memorial. The delicacy of the environment has been further underscored by the maintenance issues which have beset the memorial since its unveiling.[123] Nonetheless, while the landscape today may offer a vision of a rural idyll magically materialized in urban New York, the illusion is never complete: unlike its neighbour Central Park (perhaps one of the world's most successful artificial landscapes), its ecology irritates and pleases in equal measure, familiar yet dissonant. As Tolle described it:

> the Hunger Memorial is a landscape supported by language. The public relations people called it transplanted or rerooted landscape, but that's also not true because it's suspended between here and there. Not just between Ireland and the U.S., but also between past and present [...] It's *absolutely* an object.[124]

The 'language' to which Tolle refers is his resolution of the memorial's textual requirements. Layers of text wrap continuously around the circumference of the base and through the entry passage; silk-screened on plexiglass and mounted underneath glass, the text is intended to be changed and updated over time. The panels are backlit and grant the memorial a striking appearance after dark. Selections include extracts of Poor Law reports, parliamentary debates, newspaper accounts, quotes from governmental

121 Lydenberg, 'From Icon to Index,' 127.

122 Simon Schama, 'A Patch of Earth.' *New Yorker*, 19 August 2002.

123 Jessica Terrell, 'Major Renovation Planned for Leaking Irish Hunger Memorial.' *Tribeca Trib*, 31 January 2012; Julie E. Iovine, 'Are Memorial Designs too Complex to Last?' *The New York Times*, 22 November 2003; Jim Dwyer, 'Memorial to Irish Fortitude Comes Undone in New York.' *The New York Times*, 7 May 2003.

124 William R. Kaizen, 'Brian Tolle.' *BOMB Magazine*, Summer 2001.

officials, accounts from folklore and soup recipes, as well as statistics and quotations relating to contemporary famine, hunger and memory:

> Whenever we think of Ireland we think of lyricism [...] It didn't seem appropriate for the text to be expressed in a block form that was definitive and authoritative. And so by creating these strata we provided 8,000 linear feet of space for text [...] That amount of space allows for multiple interpretations, experiences, descriptions of the events as they unfolded, presented one next to the other, one on top of the other, one alongside the other in a way that attempts to express the extraordinary complexity of the events.[125]

Such an approach to language unsettles the authoritative role of the monument and displays a postmodern ambivalence towards historicity, acknowledging the enormous difficulty of ever knowing the past. This fluid and non-hierarchical treatment of text has not been well received by all critics, notably Simon Schama: 'Genuinely heartbreaking moments of witness are crowded out by social-studies pieties relating the number of Americans who are obese. Such pedagogy could not have been more wrong-headed, reducing history to screen-crawl captioning.'[126] Although Schama voices dismay at the juxtaposing of historical testimony and casual observance, this clash is intentional: the monument is not intended to serve as a historical text to be pedagogically 'read' or learned, but to alert us to the subjectivity of historical narration. The text refuses to offer historical placebos or Famine certainties, but rather complicates our relationship to words spoken or written across past and present – a relationship whose entanglements are usually elided on the surface of most memorials.

Unfortunately, this encounter with the written word and 'poetics of remembering'[127] is deflated somewhat by the inclusion of an audio track which can be heard in the entrance tunnel: recitations of fact, folklore and song that veer toward the maudlin and melodramatic. It comes as no surprise that this audio component did not feature on Tolle's original plan and was added later. Like all public projects, the compromises negotiated at the *Irish Hunger Memorial* are indicative of contrasting concerns and commemorative impulses. Despite Tolle's successful attempt to resist installation of a high cross on the upper landscape, a 'pilgrim' stone incised with a cross was added by the committee to the southwestern corner of the memorial. Its

125 Kaizen, 'Brian Tolle.'

126 Schama, 'A Patch of Earth.'

127 Richard Kearney, 'Exchanging Memories: New York Famine Memorial.' In *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays, 1976–2006* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 310–20.

presence feels contrived and unnecessary, but its inaccessibility on a raised section of the landscape limits its impact and it has scarcely been noticed by reviewers of the work. The most interesting compromise to the original design came through a surprise shipment of thirty-two 'county stones' from the Republic, each engraved with a different county name.[128] Dismayed at this unexpected addition and the insistence of the committee that the stones be included on the landscape, Tolle's original solution was to randomly scatter the large boulders around the landscape, some upside-down, others with the county names not visible, in line with his intention to avoid overt sentimentalism of the work. However, the discovery that 'pieces of Ireland' particular to each county were present on the memorial prompted visitors to scramble across barriers in an effort to reach, touch and/or photograph 'their' county stone. As a consequence, new plantings were trampled and safety issues became a concern, leading to a compromise to reorient the stones in accessible positions and provide a map to their location.

In interview Tolle expressed his desire to balance critical and popular responses to the memorial, and critical responses have been plentiful and mixed – some singling Tolle out for praise for avoiding Famine commemorative clichés,[129] and others, like Roberta Smith, lavishing praise on the memorial as 'an unconventional work of public art that strikes a deep emotional chord, sums up its artistic moment for a broad audience and expands the understanding of what a public memorial can be.'[130] David Frankel in *Artforum* submitted a more cautiously positive review of Tolle's 'encompassing environment', questioning what mood would be struck by the piece and to what extent its surreality lent the work a Disney-esque impression.[131] Philip Nobel in *Metropolis Magazine* adopted an opposing view, calling the 'botched' memorial an example of 'cautionary kitsch' whose adoption of multiple symbolic and monumental references 'exemplifies the pitfalls of a kitchen-sink approach, a keen danger of any design drawn in the shadow of bureaucracy'.[132] Like Smith, Nobel's comments were coloured by his concerns over the 9/11 commemoration processes currently underway, although his conclusion (in opposition to Smith[133]) was that the *Irish Hunger*

128 Interview with Tolle (2004).

129 Patrick Smyth, 'A Field in New York that is Forever Ireland.' *The Irish Times*, 20 July 2002.

130 Roberta Smith, 'A Memorial Remembers the Hungry.' *The New York Times*, 16 July 2002.

131 David Frankel, 'Hunger Artist: David Frankel on Brian Tolle.' *ArtForum* Summer (2002). Smith also notes this 'slight theme park preciousness and detail'.

132 Philip Nobel, 'Going Hungry.' *Metropolis*, November 2002.

133 'Perhaps most important, the memorial has arrived at a time when Americans, especially young Americans, have a deeper understanding of tragedy and grief, of fate's

Memorial ought to serve not as guiding light but warning sign. Though some reviewers have seemed content to overlook the actual final appearance and reception of the work and reflect only on Tolle's concept and original design, uncertainty as to viewer interpretation of the simulation has driven much of the negative criticism of the piece.[134] Janet Holtz-Kay included comments from an archaeologist who felt the cottage atypically spacious for a Famine-era cottage and questioned the landscape's actual resemblance to Ireland, before ultimately concluding herself that the memorial 'achieves originality, substance and weight […] a provocative structure with metal fiber and artistic muscle'.[135] Paddy Johnson in *Circa* described the work as 'an unlikely presence recalling more readily the notion of souvenir snow globes than a credible Irish environment'; reading Tolle's landscape as 'an act of theatre', however, he wonders if 'perhaps that same theatrical urge […] sustains our most prized memories, even our truths.'[136]

The lines between kitsch and postmodern, authentic and simulated, real and theatrical, intentional and unplanned are thinly drawn; judgement of degree largely constituted the basis for critical reaction. Nevertheless, if Tolle's creative work seems content to ply these borders, his respect for both perspectives is genuine:

> One group continues to experience the landscape on a daily basis, actually using and changing the landscape, building new buildings, new roads. And the other group left at a moment that's frozen in their mind because that's the event: their departure. To bring these two things together is the challenge. Irony is not the solution.[137]

Elevating contingency over historicity, artistic product and viewer process fold in and out of one other: emotional and romantic allusion co-exist alongside doubt and circumspection. As Richard Kearney notes, 'By refusing to either naturalize or aestheticize memory, Tolle keeps open a crucial critical "gap" that prevents history from collapsing back into a frozen past.'[138] In this

capriciousness and of the complexities of power' (Smith, 'A Memorial Remembers the Hungry').

134 David D'Arcy notes that some viewers have mistaken the Hunger Memorial as another building damaged as a result of the destruction of the WTC: David D'Arcy, 'The Trail of Tears: Memorials Multiply.' *The Art Newspaper* 133, February (2003): 6.

135 Jane Holtz Kay, 'Hunger for Memorials: New York's Monument to the Irish Famine.' *Landscape Architecture*, March 2003.

136 Paddy Johnson, 'Monumental: Paddy Johnson Looks at Architecture, Memory, and an Intriguing Icon of "Irishness."' *Circa* 105, Autumn (2003).

137 Kaizen, 'Brian Tolle.'

138 Kearney, 'Exchanging Memories,' 315.

inversion of monumentality 'the viewer stands in for the heroic statue'[139] upon the landscape:

> I don't work figuratively. I've tried to create situations where the viewer as figure becomes part of the subject matter. I'm not interested in situations where there's an empathetic other. When you're dealing with history, it's too easy to say, 'This is about them, then.' It's about the experience that you've having right now. It's about *you*.[140]

That the *Irish Hunger Memorial* has managed to satisfy contemporary art critics without undermining the popular appeal of its central image is affirmed by former BPCA Chairman Jim Gill's personal view of the memorial:

> I think that memorials should be simple, uncomplicated. And I had no interest, and I made this very very clear, in building something that someone would have to figure out, something that would require an explanation. I told them that I wanted something that was self-evident, that when you looked at it you knew what it was. I didn't want a contorted piece of art that came out of the imagination of one of these architects, where you need subtitles to figure out what it is. I want this thing to speak for itself, so that when you look at it you know precisely what it is […] Modern art is fine, and while I don't have a full appreciation for it, I do realize that it has value and worth, and I respect it. I just didn't want any part of it with respect to this memorial.[141]

Ultimately, the *Irish Hunger Memorial* may prove as elusive as the history it remembers. It fails to pacify viewers expecting a contemplative experience, and tries too hard for others looking for aesthetic subtlety or less 'theoretical clutter'.[142] It draws criticism for any allowance of the sentimental or the romantic to creep into what already is a global Famine memorial landscape overflowing with sentimentality, yet is also praised for its ability to key into an emotional register that draws the approbation of viewers seeking an 'uncomplicated' memorial. Perhaps its greatest strength lies in its willingness to create space for all the permutations of commemorative desire; to deconstruct the forces at work within the binary 'famine'/'memorial' while

139 Smith, 'A Memorial Remembers the Hungry.'
140 Kaizen, 'Brian Tolle.'
141 Interview with Gill (2004).
142 Johnson, 'Monumental.'

Figure 6.7 *Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial*, Robert Shure (2007)
Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial Committee, Inc.

presenting an aesthetic object worthy of interest and contemplation; and to create an artwork which says something about its own temporality and place within the history of commemorative art.

Conclusion

Whether prescriptive or interrogative in their aesthetic approach, the recent monuments reviewed in this chapter share a common aim to amplify the public presence of Famine memory through evocation of a wide range of associative reference: melancholy and mourning, grief and grievance, nostalgia and negation, transformation and transcendence. That some of these qualities lie in opposition to one another does not foreclose the possibility of their coexistence within single projects, nor diminish the value invested in them by their creators and commissioners. Most essentially, none of these projects can be understood without reference to one another: their interconnectedness is conceptual, processual and practical. In an interview with the *Sunday Independent* in 1997, Gillespie noted his original concept for *Famine* had in fact been considered as a possible memorial for Boston, but the committee there had found his work 'too abrasive'.[143] Sculptor Joan Walsh-Smith, a finalist in the Boston competition whose designs were deemed too symbolic and not figurative enough for that commission,[144] would later be dropped from consideration for Sydney's Famine memorial for the opposite reason. Such revelations remind the viewer and researcher that the linear narratives of memorial construction portrayed on unveiling plaques, project websites and effusive media reports may not always tell the whole story of a monument's path towards realization: their dogma is in the details.

Many of the major commissions have further emerged as career-defining pieces – especially for Tolle, Behan, Gillespie and Goodacre – heightening artistic profile, deepening practice within related themes, offering additional income via sale of editioned small-scale replicas and studies, and leading to subsequent commissions.[145] Most recently, Robert Shure and Rowan Gillespie have joined John Behan and Eamonn O'Doherty in the small group of artists who have completed multiple Famine memorial projects. Robert Shure's monument for the city of Providence (Fig. 6.7), unveiled in November 2007 at a cost of approximately $500,000 within the city's Riverwalk district, is a

143 Ferguson, 'Horror and Hope.'

144 Joan Walsh-Smith, 'Letter to the Editor: Irish Famine Memorial: A Finalist Tells her Story.' *The Boston Globe*, 4 October 1998.

145 Due to the conceptual and architectural nature of their work, Tolle and the Valamaneshes have not participated in the editioning of related works, although public art and monument projects continue to be significant dimensions of their practice.

Figure 6.8 *Ireland Park/The Arrival*, Jonathan M. Kearns (park)/ Rowan Gillespie (sculptures), Toronto, Canada (2008)
Top: photograph by Carl Chalupa; Bottom: photograph by Jesse Boles, courtesy of Ireland Park Foundation

variation on his work for Boston: a single figural bronze group is configured in a mother/son *pietá*-esque scene of death and sorrow, set back-to-back with a muscular male standing figure gazing out to the horizon beyond. The second element of the memorial complex comprises a granite wall inset with bronze narrative plaques, depicting a linear and compacted narrative of Irish experience, including scenes of work in the fields, starvation and death, emigration on coffin ships, and concluding with images of the Irish building churches and railroads in America and entering education and politics. A central plaque set in the midst of this sequence depict an Irish and Irish American family together in one composition; more than 600 donor bricks surround the commemorative plaza. Despite the decade dividing them, Shure's iconographic shorthand of Famine suffering, readable if reductive, remains firmly in place, and the monument as a whole reads as a compendium of commemorative elements now rooted within diasporic commemorative communities.

A few months previous saw the opening of Ireland Park in Toronto (Fig. 6.8), dedicated in June 2007 by Irish President Mary McAleese in a dedication ceremony attended by over 3,000 people and widely covered in the international media.[146] In support of the project the Irish government matched the Canadian government sponsorship of $500,000 (in addition to a $500,000 donation by the Ireland Fund of Canada and $200,000 from the province of Ontario); the $3.7 million memorial park is the culmination of over a decade of persistence by the Ireland Park Foundation headed by Toronto businessman Robert G. Kearns, its founder and also chairman of the Ireland Fund of Canada from 1989 to 1992.[147] Situated alongside Bathurst Quay – now renamed Eireann Quay – on the city waterfront, the site (like Dublin Docklands) is the subject of an ambitious civic regeneration with plans to develop a Waterfront Trail encircling the park. The memorial complex incorporates a 16-foot high Kilkenny limestone wall (comprised of irregular megalithic slabs meant to obliquely recall the landscapes of the Aran Islands or the Cliffs of Moher, its interior facing inscribed with the names of 675 Famine immigrants from 1847), an illuminated glass tower inset with specially-made 'naming bricks' and equipped with computerized

146 Information on the Toronto project provided by Ireland Park Foundation and in interview with Gillespie (2007) and also in interview with Robert G. Kearns (Chairman, Ireland Park Foundation), 5 June 2005 (and subsequent correspondence). See also Mark G. McGowan, *Death or Canada: The Irish Famine Migration to Toronto, 1847* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009).

147 The memorial sculptures by Rowan Gillespie (the most referenced aspect of the design) represent a relatively small percentage of the total project budget ($325,000), dwarfed by the costs of creating the park in its entirety, designed by Robert Kearns' brother, architect Jonathan M. Kearns, Partner, Kearns Mancini Architects.

touchscreens containing information on the park and Toronto's Famine history, and five bronze sculptures conceived as direct counterparts of Rowan Gillespie's Dublin figures. The limestone wall – sculptural rather than monolithic – here vies with Gillespie's bronzes as dominant commemorative feature. Forming the western boundary of the Park, its design (originally conceived as a series of megaliths, but later refined) serves as counterpoint to the contemporary glass tower, backdrop to the sculptures, and flanks the massive concrete former grain silos retained and incorporated into the new Park.

Impressed with Gillespie's Dublin *Famine* sculpture, in 1997 Kearns commissioned a related work (now entitled *The Arrival*) as a central element of Toronto's new Irish memorial site. Kearns' personal enthusiasm for Gillespie's work helped precipitate the decision to develop an entire park (as opposed to a single monument) as this option circumvented the open competition process otherwise required for public art commissions.[148] Gillespie initially hesitated to accept the project:

> I was almost afraid to go back onto it, I thought it could finish up by being like a sequel, Famine 2! Sequels are never as good as the first one – I knew I needed to get completely fresh ideas and to be able to do something which had to relate, but it would be different at the same time.[149]

Ireland Park's promotional material presents a more confident retelling of the work's evolution:

> It was always my intention, to complement my famine sculpture in Dublin, that there should be a sculpture of a group of figures arriving on the other side of the Atlantic [...] what would be the fate of this bedraggled group – how many of them would even survive the crossing? [...] Seven years have passed since I made the sculpture for Dublin and first visited Toronto. During this time my thoughts and ideas have matured and I feel that this sculpture for Toronto will truly be an evolution and development, responding with sensitivity to the site.[150]

The five completed figures include a pregnant woman, a man extending his arms at the sight of the New World, a child warily gazing ahead towards the skyline, a woman collapsed in utter exhaustion (or in death) and a man

148 Interview with Gillespie (2007). See also Noah Richler, 'Ireland Park: Arrival Point.' *Canadian Art*, Summer 2010.

149 Burke, 'Sculpting Life.'

150 Rowan Gillespie, http://www.irelandparkfoundation.com.

cowering in trepidation. Intriguingly, Gillespie decided to base the latter figure on the character of Pius Mulvey from Joseph O'Connor's bestselling Famine emigration novel *The Star of the Sea* (2002).[151] Mulvey features in the work as a sinister survivor of the Famine, a murderer both bleakly comic and utterly depraved, referred to by his fellow passengers as 'the ghost' or 'the monster'. Though he finds no redemption at the conclusion of the tale, Mulvey is an ambivalent character: evoking sympathy but appalling in his violence, he represents the deep and dark conflict of class, circumstance and extremes of human survival forced in desperate times – hardly a one-dimensional Famine stereotype. However, reference to Mulvey as a basis for the sculpture was edited out of the text produced by the Foundation for the opening ceremony, the figure renamed 'The Apprehensive Man' and described on their website as 'on his knees in prayer and gratitude'. Each of the additional figures were also renamed 'The Jubilant Man', 'Pregnant Woman', 'Woman On Ground', and 'The Orphan Boy', and offered as sponsorship opportunities for donors. The characterization of the figures' journey as a transatlantic saga celebrating 'triumph over adversity'[152] anchors the foundation's sophisticated publicity material, and the creation of the parallel 'arrival' group moves Gillespie's newest Famine work into territory similar to John Behan's twin ships in Mayo and New York, as another version of the familiar 'here and there' dichotomy of Famine sculptural representation, featured also in Boston, Philadelphia and Providence. Plans to electronically link Toronto's glass tower computer screens with Dublin's Custom House Quay – beaming images of each memorial site to one another across the Atlantic – perhaps offers the most technologically advanced variation of this motif, and further illustrates the immediacy of contact and exchange which has united Famine commemorative projects.

In many ways, the unveiling of the Toronto monument forms an apt coda for two decades' worth of monumental production since the 'official' anniversary year, as an example of the extraordinary value placed on Famine memory which charges forth into the present, the conflation of both modern and nineteenth-century modes of representation, and the harnessing of aesthetic forms and narrative to serve contemporary agendas. Whether ultimately orthodox or progressive in their formal outcomes, these projects' evolution affirms that the visual is not simply symptomatic or evidential of memory, but an active means by which the Famine past is apprehended and accorded place in our present. As the expanded field of Famine commemoration ripples ever outward and onward, occupying both public space and public discourse, these monuments testify to the role (and possibility) of visualization as screen, cipher and crux of memory.

151 Interview with Gillespie (2007).
152 Interview with Kearns (2005).

7
Conclusion

> […] the more closely one examines the use to which memorials and commemoration have been put in twentieth-century Ireland the more does it become apparent that their effects have often been the creation of heat rather than light.[1]

> […] there can be no innocent narrative of the Famine.[2]

We have arrived at the beginning of the twenty-first century with two decades of Famine monument-making behind us, and undoubtedly more ahead. Ireland's overstuffed commemorative calendar now includes an annual day of National Famine Commemoration, yet other memorial sites (in both Ireland and the diaspora) have slipped into quiet decay as the commemorative fever subsides. Throughout the 1990s former Irish President Mary Robinson widely promoted the notion of a 'shared Famine heritage' between Ireland and its diaspora, but the outcomes of the 150th anniversary suggest such concordance is illusory. In Ireland, the legacy of the Famine remains one of displacement and death, now apprehended by a postcolonial nation whose revived economic fortunes at the time of the anniversary are again in decline, and remains subject to endless instrumentalization across the political spectrum. In the diaspora, the Famine persists as part of the foundation myth of immigrant nations and a vehicle for asserting ethnic difference by a shrinking demographic, even as its memory has formed the basis for renewed bonds of solidarity between commemorative groups. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that however productive the revival of Famine memory has been for some purposes, the recent and ongoing construction of these new *lieux de mémoire*

1 K. Theodore Hoppen, 'Review: The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine.' *English Historical Review* April (1999): 473–4.

2 Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 187.

is not an indicator of an assured mastery of the Famine past, but a signifier of social anxiety, political conflict and crises of identity. Whether the future of Famine representation will remain bound within processes of self-affirmation, political instrumentalization and anachronistic visual practices remains open; what is certain, however, is the stamp our present preoccupations have made on the construction of the Famine past.

Concerns voiced during the anniversary that the commemorations would generate 'heat rather than light' have indeed materialized at many new sites of monument and memorial. On the one hand, the plying of Famine memory and history in Ireland to support contemporary agendas of cultural tourism or a 'working through' of historical trauma has had uneasy overtones of commodification of experience and expurgation of the darker, conflicted realities of Famine inheritances. To describe Ireland in 2004 as a 'country which has triumphantly overcome its famine legacy'[3] substitutes redemptive sound bites to the detriment of a nuanced reckoning of the destructive consequences of the Famine in Ireland, even when the ultimate aim of such framings has been the generation of charitable sentiments and monies, or a genuine desire to redress historical wrongs. Moreover, in the grim aftermath of Ireland's economic collapse such pronouncements today seem at best naïve and, at worst, deluded.

On the other side of the Atlantic, positivist narratives of diasporic ascendancy from Famine origins have eclipsed potential engagements with contemporary immigration policy, race and social exclusion, particularly in the United States, where such parallels with nineteenth-century emigrant experience might conceivably have been sought. Visual or textual reference to struggles faced by contemporary migrants (a far more politically divisive subject than alleviation of hunger or overseas African famine aid) has proved almost entirely absent from recent U.S. memorial projects (and from the majority of Canadian ones as well). That genealogical celebration may serve to subtly reinforce racism, discourses of whiteness, or bolster claims of Irish ethnic exceptionalism forms a common refrain within much recent scholarship (including that of Mary Waters, Catherine Nash, Reginald Byron and David Lloyd) sceptical of the peculiar dominance of immigrant origin myths amongst Irish descendants – and the evidence of the Famine's memorialization does little to dispel such concerns or indicate the emergence of a more progressive politics of remembrance.

In adopting a transnational approach, this study has addressed contemporary Famine commemoration as a form of cultural knowledge and practice shared between Ireland and its diaspora. The borrowing and replication of

3 Tom Arnold, 'Time for Ireland to Lead Fight against Hunger.' *The Irish Times*, 12 July 2004.

commemorative concepts and visual imagery between committees, references made to both local and national particulars of place and history (yet situated within global frames of reference), and kinship of formal outcomes all illustrate a global network of Irish memorial practice unparalleled in Irish commemorative history. Moreover, the details of these monuments' evolution reveal a diasporic relationship that is not hierarchical (with Ireland at its centre or apex) but nodal and overlapping. Though both Famine history and memory are often popularly construed as static – history as the 'facts' of the past, or memory as heritage – their transnational commemoration evidences the true volatility and socially mediated nature of the past in our present: 'its messiness, its non-linearity, its vigorous and stubbornly visible incompatibilities'.[4] Indeed, the very diversity of this 'collective' and monumental phenomenon compels a redefinition of Famine memory from a distinct and recoverable 'thing' or set of beliefs, towards an understanding of it as an unfolding series of processes and positions.

At the outset this book sought to revisit the Famine's visual history and the corpus of representations that comprised its initial framing, examining the circumstances of these images' creation, the relationships established between subject, artist and viewer, and patterns of their reception and translation in the present. This survey reveals the range of Famine-related imaging to be much broader than commonly held – a complex, shifting range of visualizations – far removed from the 'silence' or absence of representation commonly attributed to the period. Nevertheless, the conventions of picturesque, romantic and sentimental genre depiction have dominated such renderings. The permeability and fluidity of the experience of Famine, the artistic climate and norms of 1840s Ireland which governed systems of representation, and recognition of how such images have been mediated in their time (and ours) thus compel the modern viewer to readjust expectations of what constitutes 'authentic' or 'realistic' renderings – and to recognize symmetries of use and affect linking the Victorian and contemporary visual culture of Famine. Though the beseeching mother, ragged child or downtrodden family may populate Famine representation from both 1847 and 1997, the relationship to these figures sought by the viewer has shifted dramatically. However, the conditions of this relationship – of the nineteenth-century predilection for sentiment or the contemporary yearning for the 'authentic' experience of ancestors – remain equally the product of the viewer, and his/her own historical moment.

The evocation of emotion has continued to play an essential role in the framing of Famine experiences for a public audience, whether through modern memorials' meditations on the scale of death and loss (as in Ireland)

4 Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 5.

or figurative/symbolic representations of the emigrant experience (as in the diaspora). It is unquestionable that the intent of most memorials to the Famine is to elicit a deep, personal emotional response to an experience perceived as 'dormant' and unacknowledged: a breaking of the 'silence' of Famine by the 'speaking' of the monument. The 'call to remembrance' voiced by many monuments has been articulated as an opportunity to empathize with the experience of past forebears, either directly (within the diaspora's situating of Famine memory within genealogical ties), or at slight remove (within Ireland's marking of the final resting places of the unnamed dead). The hostility to 'revisionist' retellings of Famine history (construed as an attempt to subvert or de-emphasize emotional response), the strength of historical trauma and postmemory as hermeneutic, the uni-dimensional narrative of diasporic 'becoming' grounded in empathetical visual strategies and ancestral identification – all such elements suggest that despite the increased focus within Famine historiography on issues of contextuality and a more complex view of Famine causes-and-effects, the impact of these shifts has been minimal on traditional understandings of the Famine's relevance. Aspects of the Famine's legacy that do not easily align with embedded narratives – the role of the Irish middle classes, inter- and intra- class relations, souperism and the Catholic hierarchy's response to the crisis, diversity of migration patterns and emigrant experience – are rarely referenced at the site of memorial, and may yet require another generation of memory before admittance (if ever) to the commemorative domain.

The question of whether contemporary Famine commemoration constitutes a continuation of nineteenth-century modes of visualization or a definitive break must therefore be answered emphatically in support of the former. This is not to claim an entirely homogenous array of visual solutions: from reconstructed thatch cottages to heart-shaped fountains, bland laser-etched granite markers to elaborate bronzes, community gardens to a ¼ acre of Irish landscape elevated in the middle of New York City – the yield of the Famine anniversary has been prodigious and often surprising. Nevertheless, with the exception of the projects discussed in Chapter 6, the majority of Famine monuments worldwide display an intensely conservative visual approach, with a significant number relying on a small body of nineteenth-century prototypes (such as newspaper engravings or high crosses) and megalithic reconstructions. Though the meaning of some signifiers assumes a different role depending on the national context (as with the high cross' more explicit religious significance in Ireland as opposed to America or Canada), the deployment of Famine clichés and Irish ethnic stereotypes still abounds – there is no shortage of shamrocks and coffin ships, nor Bridgets on plinths.

Moreover, there have been few formal differences between monuments

conceived on a local scale and those intended for national prominence, where modes of representation and iconography have often been extremely similar, and usually far removed from more progressive strategies of remembrance visible in other commemorative arenas. Conceptual approaches common to explorations of Famine themes within contemporary art are generally absent from Famine monuments, with the significant exceptions of Brian Tolle's work in New York, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh's monument in Sydney, and Cornet and Gilbert Associates' new memorial in Grosse Île. Hence, even in the case of the New York Famine memorial, in spite of its formal qualifications as a 'post-modern' memorial and its creator's background as a conceptual artist, the public response to the memorial has often focused on an appreciation of its mimetic accuracy and the nostalgic reification of the 'pieces of Ireland' it presents.

The patchy inclusion of visual artists in the commemorative process – or in other cases, the tight conscription of visual possibilities by the commissioning committee (who often had a firm idea already in mind with respect to outcome) – has further served to stunt the artistic legacy of the Famine's commemoration. Certainly examples exist to refute assumptions that this outcome was inevitable: New York and Sydney offer two provocative and insightful responses to the Famine (the latter at a fraction of the cost of several other projects), and locally the efforts in Liverpool, Clones and Sligo have generated thoughtful explorations of local Famine spaces and memory. Likewise, many of the major memorials (Mayo, Dublin, Toronto, Grosse Île) offer compelling and considered ventures into the deep waters of Famine memory. However, the construction of several extraordinarily expensive and historically blinkered works (including Boston and Philadelphia) indicates that a retrograde, bombastic visual vocabulary of Famine continues to hold sway in some quarters. All too often the vocabulary of Famine remembrance is taken to be self-evident, as if thatched cottages, emigrant ships and emaciated figures are 'natural' or axiomatic images of Famine. However, this assumption is no more true than the belief that minimalism or abstraction are 'natural' (or neutral) commemorative forms for the Holocaust: such choices have everything to do with the history of the event's visuality, current political concerns and aesthetic preferences, and relationships across commemorative communities that reinforce circularity. Traumatic frames of reference, 'Third World' politics, the urgency to sustain Irish diasporic identity, or the explosion of a new commemorative enterprise at a moment when such initiatives now dominate public life and space – all are symptoms of the *kunstwollen* of our own time. This suggests that while the ongoing commemoration of the Famine will continue to refract points of view and agendas, it cannot possibly contain within itself the ability to 'heal', create closure or reconcile memory.

This critique, however, is a reaction to what has been produced, not a vision for what might be. What might a transformative aesthetic of Famine look like? I believe it would intersect with past histories of representation without reverting to a simplistic restaging of the encounter between victim and viewer, and in so doing acknowledge the disparity of Famine suffering and its mixed legacy to the diaspora. It would problematize the ethics of encountering the Famine sufferer, refusing easy sympathies or empathies with their experience, and resist the collapsing of historical difference in the service of a narcissistic and politically naive emotional response. It would be wary of the easy hit of sentimentality whilst remaining mindful that striking an emotional chord remains a powerful mode of viewer engagement. Visually, it would present an object or image that invites repeated looking and thinking, not merely a shorthand of ethnic signification. Such a work would demonstrate appropriateness to site and spatiality, anticipate likely modes of future encounter, yet not overburden itself with over-determining or circumscribing possible responses. It would, in essence, achieve what the most celebrated of modern memorials have similarly accomplished: a sustained reflection on loss, sacrifice, suffering and legacy – without loss of emotional impact or keen awareness of our complex relationship to this troubled, devastating epoch of history.

Whilst such a list might seem ambitious, in many cases the most powerful commemorative solution or intervention may very well be a minimal one. As the programme for Ireland's 'decade of commemoration' from 2012-22 accelerates (including centenaries of the Ulster Covenant, Home Rule Bill, 1913 Lockout, Easter Rising, First World War and founding of the Free State) – and Famine monuments also continue in planning and development – devising robust and meaningful strategies for commemorative public art will remain a vitally important endeavour. In any instance, the primary resources required are not high levels of funding, but thoughtful consideration and engagement with a diverse collective able to bring multiple perspectives to the planning table. To remember is to construct and recall, and to view art is to participate in the *work* of art. If and when these imperatives coalesce on the subject of Famine and other histories, we may encounter opportunities for reflections on memory and human experience that surpass commemorative efforts to date, retain their collective value, and yet offer a deeper encounter between past and present, within ourselves and across historical time.

Distinctions are frequently drawn within scholarship on memory and commemoration between 'memorials' and 'monuments', usually arguing for the latter's decline in favour of the former in contemporary society and artistic practice, as contingency and multivocality have supposedly superseded the monolithic, didactic and ideologically restrictive nature of older forms of

commemoration. However, the global field of Famine commemoration – as revealed by the case studies reviewed in this book – indicates that no such division or resolution can be so easily imposed. The diverse backgrounds, agendas and processes of those responsible for Famine memory projects; the influence of national, local and global politics and contexts; and their varied formal rapprochements offer compelling examples of how memorial and monumental strategies have been activated at all levels of commemoration, often simultaneously within individual projects themselves. There is no one community of Famine memory, but many.

In the aggregate, what unfolds from the simple command 'remember the Famine' is a motley crew of sculptural memorials confirming the suspicion that we cannot possibly locate a singular 'authentic' Famine experience in a visual form. Such an impossibility denies the fulfilment of heritage-based claims to present a fixed and stable version of the past. The legacy of the Famine in Ireland and abroad will never be resolved and neatly compartmentalized; nor should it. In an age of globalization and the reduction of complex historical realities into a consumable 'heritage', the Famine remains a dislocation whose contradictions outnumber its certainties. This book has comprised an initial effort to explore these contradictions; it is hoped that by bringing together the considerable output of commemorative efforts to date, and by outlining various ways in which Famine memories matter and to whom, the phenomenon of Famine commemoration may be understood with greater depth, breadth and respect for the value it so clearly holds for many.

Appendix
Famine monuments – a global survey

This appendix comprises post-1990s Famine monuments and memorials surveyed over the course of this research. It should not be considered exhaustive – particularly with respect to the many smaller community commemorations located throughout Ireland – and includes primarily new three-dimensional monuments or significant re-dedications of pre-existing monuments (as opposed to plaques or signpostings of Famine-era relics).

More extensive details (including inscriptions, photographs, location and further historical details) may be found on www.irishfaminememorials.com (maintained by the author). As this is an evolving survey, new records of new monuments and other additions/corrections are most welcome.

Listings are organized by country and region/county/state. Information includes city/town, region, date, title of monument (untitled works listed as *Famine Memorial*), artist (if a visual artist was commissioned) and commissioning group or individual.

Australia

Sydney, New South Wales (1999)
Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine
Artists: Hossein and Angela Valamanesh
Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in collaboration with the the Irish Famine Commemoration Committee

Melbourne, Victoria (1998)
Melbourne Famine Monument
Melbourne Irish Famine 150th Commemoration Committee

Canada

Bathurst, New Brunswick (1997)
Celtic Cross
Bathurst Chapter, Irish Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick

Middle Island, New Brunswick (1984/1993/1997)
Celtic Cross/Cairn/Commemorative Meadow
Irish Festival Inc.

Moncton, New Brunswick (2000)
Irish Families Memorial
Moncton Chapter, Irish Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick

Saint John, New Brunswick (1994)
Celtic Cross
Saint John Chapter, Irish-Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick

Saint John, New Brunswick (1967/1997 rededicated and additional memorial added)
Celtic Cross
St. Patrick's Society and the Saint John Chapter, Irish-Canadian Cultural Association of New Brunswick

St-Andrews-by-the-Sea/Hospital Island, New Brunswick (1995)
Celtic Cross
Charlotte County chapter of the Irish Canadian Cultural Society of New Brunswick

Kingston, Ontario (1998)
Celtic Cross
Kingston Irish Famine Commemoration Association

Kingston, Ontario (2000)
Memorial Drinking Fountain
Kingston Irish Folk Club

Kingston, Ontario (2002)
Celtic Cross
Kingston Irish Folk Club

Kingston, Ontario (2002)
Celtic Cross
Kingston Irish Folk Club

Maidstone, Ontario (2000)
Celtic Cross
Parish of St Mary's

Toronto, Ontario (2007)
Ireland Park (Sculpture title: Arrival)
Rowan Gillespie (artist), Jonathan M. Kearns (architect)
Ireland Park Foundation

Grosse Île, Québec (1998)
Le Mémorial
Lucienne Cornet (artist), Emile Gilbert and Associates (France Laberge, César Herrera, architects)
Department of Canadian Heritage

Québec City, Québec (2000)
Celtic Cross
James Callery/Commission de la Capitale nationale du Quebec, the City of Quebec and Parks Canada.

Richmond, Québec (2002)
Celtic Cross
St. Patrick's Society of Richmond & Vicinity

Saint-Côme-Linière, Québec (2007)
Celtic Cross
La Societe historique de Saint-Côme de Kennebec et de Linière

Saint-Odilon-de-Cranbourne, Québec (2009)
Celtic Cross

Ste-Agathe de Lotbinière, Québec (1997/2000)
The Celtic Corner (Celtic Cross/Stone Circle)
Coirneal Cealteach

Ireland

Carlow, Co. Carlow (1997)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
Carlow County Heritage Society

Ennistymon, Co. Clare (1995)
The Great Hunger Memorial
Artist: Alan F. Ryan Hall
Clare County Council and Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin)

Feakle, Co. Clare (1997)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
Local drama group

Tuamgraney, Co. Clare (1997)
East Clare Heritage Famine Memorial Park ('Casaoireach')
East Clare Heritage

Aghinagh, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
Aghinagh Heritage Group

Ballingeary, Co. Cork (1997)
Coolmountain Soup Pot
Cumann Staire

Cashel, Co. Cork (2010)
Famine Memorial, St Mark's Cemetery
Cashel Arts and Heritage Society

Canovee, Co. Cork (1997)
Soup House Kitchen Crossroads Memorial
Canovee Historical Society

Castletownbere, Co. Cork (1996)
Famine Memorial – The Glebe
Beara Historical Society

Clondrohid, Co. Cork (1990s)
Famine Memorial, Carrigastyra
Lee Valley Famine Commemoration Committee

Cork, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – St Finbarr's Hospital

Cork, Co. Cork (2009)
Famine Memorial – St Joseph's Cemetery
Cork City Council

Douglas, Co. Cork (1958/additional markers added in 1997)
Famine Memorial, Carr's Hill
Created by William Sorenson (also referred to as 'Olaf' or 'Jack' Sorenson)
Self-constructed by Sorenson; later plaques added by Cork Civic Trust/An Gorta Mor Famine Commemoration Committee

Drimoleague, Co. Cork (1995)
Famine Memorial
Curly Cahalane and Sean O'Brien, cross by Maurice and Billy Murphy
Drimoleague Historical Society

Dunmanway, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – Fanlobbus Graveyard
Dunmanway Environmental Awareness Group and Dunmanway Macra na Feirme

Enniskeane, Co. Cork (2009)
Famine Memorial – Kinneigh Graveyard
Coppeen Archaeological, Historical & Cultural Society

Fermoy, Co. Cork (1992)
Famine Memorial – Carrignagroghera Graveyard
Fermoy Field Club

Kilmichael, Co. Cork (2000)
Famine Memorial – Gurranreigh Cross
Kilmichael Historical Society

Kilshinahin, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
Local committee

Mallow, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
Mallow District Council

Mitchelstown, Co Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – Mitchelstown Town Hall
Mitchelstown Heritage Society

Schull, Co. Cork (1997)
Famine Memorial – St Mary's Church
Mizen Historical & Archaeological Society

Skibbereen, Co. Cork (1996)
Famine Memorial – Abbeystrewery Cemetery
Irish Famine Commemoration (Skibbereen) Ltd.

Donegal town, Co. Donegal (1990s)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
(Unknown)

Kill, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal (1990s)
Famine Memorial – Famine graveyard
(Unknown)

Dublin, Co. Dublin (1997)
Famine
Artist: Rowan Gillespie
Norma Smurfit (donated to Irish government)

Annaghdown, Co. Galway (1997)
Famine Memorial
Annaghdown Heritage Society

Ballinasloe, Co. Galway (1997)
Famine Remembrance Park
Dedication and memorial monument: John O'Connor; Urn monument: Helen Comerford
Ballinasloe Historical Society and Ballinasloe Urban Council

Carraroe, Co. Galway (1997)
Trá na bPáistí/The Children's Strand
Local committee headed by Peadar MacDonncha; work carried out as part of a local FÁS scheme

Galway, Co. Galway (2009/20012)
Celia Griffin Memorial Park/Famine Ship Memorial
Famine Memorial Committee (led by Mark Kennedy)

Glenamaddy, Co. Galway (1995)
Famine Memorial, Mountkelly
Arts & Historical Society and Galway County Council

Kenmare, Co. Kerry (1990s)
Famine Memorial – Old Kenmare cemetery
(Unknown)

Killarney, Co. Kerry (1990s)
Gorta – St Mary's Cathedral
(Unknown)

Tralee, Co. Kerry (1997)
God's Acre – Ballybeggan
Tralee Urban District Council

Athy, Co. Kildare (2000)
Famine Family – St Vincent's Geriatric Hospital
Artist: James McKenna
Kildare County Council

Celbridge, Co Kildare (2007)
Famine Memorial 'Remembrance' – Celbridge Workhouse
Artist: Jarlath Daly
Celbridge Tidy Towns Committee

Naas, Co. Kildare (1990s)
Famine Memorial – Naas General Hospital
Naas Local History Group

Naas, Co. Kildare (1990s)
Famine Graveyard Memorial Park
Naas Local History Group

Callan, Co. Kilkenny (1994)
Famine Memorial – Cherryfield Cemetery
Action from Ireland

Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny (2010)
Famine Memorial Garden (MacDonagh Junction)
MacDonagh Junction Development Company

Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny (1999)
Gairdín an Ghorta (Famine Garden)
Newmarket Development Association/Tidy Towns Committee

Durrow, Co. Laois (2007)
Famine and Emigration Memorial Wall
Durrow Development Forum

Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim (1994–8)
Famine Memorial Garden
Carrick-on-Shannon and District Historical Society, with additional monument by the County Leitrim Society of New York

Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim (2006)
Famine Memorial – Leitrim County Hospital
Rose McPadden and the Famine Graveyard Committee / HSE

Ballingarry, Co. Limerick (1998)
Knockfierna Famine Commemoration Park
Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group

Cappamore, Co. Limerick (1997)
Famine Memorial – St Michael's Church
Artist: Michael Killeen
Cappamore Historical Society

Kilmallock, Co. Limerick (1999)
Kilmallock Famine Memorial Park
Kilmallock Famine Memorial Park

Limerick, Co. Limerick (1997)
Broken Heart Fountain
Artist: Maria Pizzuti
Gerry Barrett (Edward Holdings Ltd. Galway)

Newcastle West, Co Limerick (1991)
Famine Memorial Gates – St Ita's Hospital
Artist: Cliodna Cussen
Famine Cemetery Committee

Longford, Co. Longford (1995–6)
Famine Garden of Remembrance
Sister Calasanctius, with cooperation of Longford County Council and the Midland Health Board

Ballina, Co. Mayo (1995)
Famine Memorial – Ballina District Hospital
Killala Diocese Famine Heritage Committee

Doolough, Co. Mayo (1990s)
Famine Memorial
Action from Ireland

Doolough, Co. Mayo (1994)
Famine Memorial
Action from Ireland

Murrisk, Co. Mayo (1997)
National Famine Memorial/Coffin Ship
Artist: John Behan
Irish National Famine Commemoration Committee

Swinford, Co. Mayo (1994)
Famine Memorial – Swinford District Hospital
Action from Ireland

Kells, Co. Meath (1993)
Famine Memorial, Hill of Lloyd
Action from Ireland

Moylagh, Co. Meath (2012)
Famine Memorial
Moylagh Historical Society

Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan (1995)
Famine Memorial – St Mary's Hospital
Castleblayney Community Enterprise

Clones, Co. Monaghan (2001)
Famine Memorial – Clones Famine Graveyard
Artists: Carolyn Mulholland (bronze figure), Yoram Drori (plaques)
Clones Famine Graveyard Committee

Drum, Co. Monaghan (1996)
Famine Memorial
Drum Heritage Committee

Killeevan, Co. Monaghan (1997)
Famine Memorial – St Livinius Church
Killeevan Heritage Group

Ballyboy, Co Offaly (1996–7)
Famine memorial
Tommy Hayden

Edenderry, Co. Offaly (1958/renovated 1997, 2009)
Famine Memorial/Commemorative Gates
Muintir na Tire / Edenderry Historical Society

Tullamore, Co. Offaly (2007)
Famine Memorial Garden
Offaly Famine Commemoration Committee

Ardcarne, Co. Roscommon (1997)
Tamhlacht
Artist: Jackie McKenna
Fr Henry Tonra

Ballykilcline, Co. Roscommon (1999)
Nurturing
Artist: Michael Casey
Ballykilcline Society

Castlerea, Co. Roscommon (2009)
Famine Commemoration Stone, Sacred Heart Hospital
Castlerea Church Pastoral Council and Roscommon County Council

Roscommon, Co. Roscommon (1999)
County Famine Memorial Garden
Artist: Elizabeth McLaughlin (sculptor), with casting assistance from Maurice Harron; Mary O'Carroll (O'Carroll Associates, architect)
Roscommon Famine Committee

Sligo Town, Co. Sligo (1997)
Faoin Sceach, St John's Hospital
Artist: Fred Conlon
Co. Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee

Sligo Town, Co. Sligo (1997)
Untitled (graveyard gates), St John's Hospital
Artist: Niall Bruton
Co. Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee

Sligo Town, Co. Sligo (1997)
Famine Family
Artist: Niall Bruton
Co. Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee

Anacarty, Co. Tipperary (2000)
Famine Memorial, St Brigid's Church
Anacarty Parish Committee (Fr Tony Ryan, PP)

Roscrea, Co. Tipperary (2004)
Scart Famine Memorial Garden
Artist: Tommy Madden
Kennedy Park Development Group/Roscrea 2000 Ltd.

Tipperary, Co. Tipperary (1995)
Famine Memorial, St John's Graveyard
Friends of St John's Graveyard/FÁS

Ballyinaneashagh, Co. Waterford (1996)
Famine Memorial, St Otteran's Cemetery
Waterford Corporation

Dungarvan, Co. Waterford (1998)
Famine Commemorative Sculpture, Waterford County Library
Artists: Tom Hayes and Dick Joynt
Waterford Crystal/Waterford County Council

Kilmacthomas, Co. Waterford (2002)
Famine Memorial, former workhouse
(Unknown)

Kilrossanty, Co. Waterford (1995)
Famine Memorial, Old Cemetery
Parish of Kilrossanty and Fews

Kilrush, Co. Waterford (1995)
Famine Memorial, Kilrush Cemetery
Waterford County Museum

Pulla, Ring, Co. Waterford (1996)
Famine Memorial, Reilig an tSléibe Famine Graveyard
Dungarvan Famine Graveyard Restoration Committee

Mullingar, Co. Westmeath (1994)
Famine Memorial
Edmund Rice 150th Anniversary Committee

Mullingar, Co. Westmeath (1997)
Famine Memorial
Artist: Gerard Leslie
Mullingar Town Council

Ballygarrett, Co. Wexford (1996)
Famine Memorial, Ballygarrett Cemetery
Ballygarrett Heritage Committee

Northern Ireland

Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim (1990s)
Famine Memorial Stone
(Unknown)

Armagh, Co. Armagh (2001/2002)
Famine Memorial (Cross marker/Memorial stone), Armagh County Hospital
Southern Health and Social Services Board

Magherafelt, Co. Derry (1995)
Celtic Cross, Glen Chapel
Glen Ancient Order of Hibernians, Division 367

Ardess, Co. Fermanagh (2000)
Famine Grave, St Mary's Church of Magheraculmoney
Ardess Community Association

Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh (1996)
Famine Memorial
Artist: Eamonn O'Doherty
Fermanagh District Council

Irvinestown, Co. Fermanagh (1997)
Famine Memorial, Rehill Park housing estate
Irvinestown Famine Committee

England

Liverpool, England (1998)
Liverpool Famine Memorial
Artist: Eamonn O'Doherty
The Great Famine Commemoration Committee Liverpool

Scotland

Carfin, Lanarkshire, Scotland (2001)
National Irish Famine Monument (Scotland)
Irish Famine Commemoration Committee Scotland

Islay, Scotland (2000)
Memorial to the Exmouth
Joseph Wiggins and the Exmouth Memorial Fund

Wales

Cardiff, Wales (2002)
Wales Great Famine Memorial
Wales Famine Forum

United States

Phoenix, Arizona (1999)
An Gorta Mór Great Hunger Memorial
Artist: Maureen McGuire
Irish Cultural Center

Lecanto, Florida (2000)
An Gorta Mor Monument
Citrus County Division, Ancient Order of Hibernians

Oak Forest, Illinois (1999)
Famine Memorial
Artist: Fr Brankin
Chicago Gaelic Park members

Davenport, Iowa (2011)
Irish Memorial
Artist: Lou Quaintance
St. Patrick Society

Boston, Massachusetts (1998)
Boston Irish Famine Memorial
Artist: Robert Shure
Boston Irish Famine Memorial Committee and City of Boston

Cambridge, Massachusetts (1997)
An Gorta Mór – The Great Hunger
Artist: Maurice Harron
Cambridge Famine Committee

Charlestown, Massachusetts (2009)
The Children of the Famine Memorial
Charlestown Historical Society and Saint Francis de Sales Cemetery Memorial Project Committee

Lawrence, Massachusetts (2006)
An Gorta Mor (The Great Hunger)
Irish Foundation of Lawrence and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, James T. O'Reilly Division 8, Lawrence Massachusetts

Irish Hills, Michigan (2004)
An Gorta Mor Hibernian Memorial
Artist: Kenneth M. Thompson
The Ancient Order of Hibernians, St. Patrick's Division 1, City of Adrian, Michigan

Hackensack, New Jersey (1995)
The Great Hunger Memorial 1845- 1849
Bergen County Council of Irish Associations

Jersey City, New Jersey (2011)
Famine Memorial Monument
Friendly Sons of St. Patrick of Hudson County

Keansburg, New Jersey (1997)
Great Hunger Memorial
Artist: Brian Hanlon
Brian Boru Division of Monmouth County, New Jersey, Volunteer Patrick Torphy Division 2

Albany, New York (2005)
Irish Famine Memorial Garden
Ancient Order of Hibernians, Albany County, Division 5 and Ladies' Ancient Order of Hibernians Division 1

Ardsley, New York (2001)
Great Hunger Memorial
Artist: Eamonn O'Doherty
Great Hunger Foundation and Memorial Committee

Buffalo, New York (1997)
The Western New York Irish Famine Memorial
Designer: Rob Ferguson
Western Irish New York Famine Commemoration Committee

Marlboro, New York (2009)
An Gorta Mor Cross
Father Con C. Woulfe Division 1, Ancient Order of Hibernians, Ulster County

New York City, New York (2000)
Arrival
Artist: John Behan
Office of Public Works (a gift to the United Nations by the Irish government)

New York City, New York (2002)
Irish Hunger Memorial
Artist: Brian Tolle
Battery Park City Authority

Olean, New York (2000)
Southern Tier Irish Famine Memorial
Ancient Order of Hibernians, Cattaraugus County Division 2, Olean

Rochester, New York (1997)
Rochester Irish Famine Memorial
Monroe County Ancient Order of Hibernians

Cleveland, Ohio (2000)
Memorial to the Great Hunger
Paula Blackman (sculptor), Eamon D'Arcy (carver)
Cleveland Famine Memorial Committee

Portland, Oregon (2008)
Oregon's Famine Memorial
Artist: Brendan McGloin
Portland Irish Famine Memorial Committee

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2003)
Philadelphia Irish Memorial
Artist: Glenna Goodacre
Irish Memorial, Inc.

Providence, Rhode Island (2007)
Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial
Artist: Robert Shure
Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial Committee, Inc.

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INTERVIEWS

Note: Referenced below are initial formal interviews; my thanks to respondents for their participation in follow-up interviews and ongoing correspondence as projects have evolved over the past decade.

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Interview with John Behan (Artist). 7 June 2007.

Interview with Michael Bogle (Former curator of Hyde Park Barracks Museum). 27 March 2006.

Interview with Noel Carmody (Treasurer, Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group). 3 April 2003.

Interview with John Donovan (President, Irish Memorial Inc.). 15 June 2005.

Interview with Avril Doyle (Former Chair, Famine Commemoration Committee). 7 August 2007.

Interview with James A. Gill (Chairman, Battery Park City Authority). 16 March 2004.

Interview with Rowan Gillespie (Artist). 9 August 2007.

Interview with Glenna Goodacre (Artist). 28 February 2007.

Interview with Robert G. Kearns (Chairman, Ireland Park Foundation). 5 June 2005.

Interview with Peter McClave (Chairman, Clones Famine Commemoration Committee). 23 July 2007.

Interview with Joe McGowan (Chairman, Sligo Famine Commemoration Committee). 24 July 2007.

Interview with Carolyn Mulholland (Artist). 28 July 2007.

Interview with Don Mullan (Former chairman, Action from Ireland). 1 August 2007.

Interview with Eamonn O'Doherty (Artist). 1 September 2006.

Interview with Pat O'Donovan (Chairman, Knockfierna Heritage and Folklore Group). 30 July 2007.

Interview with Tony O'Loughlin (Founder and President, Kingston Irish Famine Commemoration Committee/Kingston Irish Folk Club). 21 June 2005.

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Interview with Greg Quiery and Frank McIver (Liverpool Famine Commemoration Committee). 12 March 2005.
Interview with Laurence Shine, Mike Flynn, and Charles Treanor (Members of Western New York Famine Commemoration Committee). 19 June 2005.
Interview with Robert Shure (Artist). 5 April 2007.
Interview with Fr Eamonn Sweeney (Carfin Lourdes Grotto). 31 April 2005.
Interview with Brian Tolle (Artist). 18 March 2004.
Interview with Hossein and Angela Valamanesh (Artists). 22 March 2006.
Interview with Harold E. Wright (Heritage Resources/Saint John Famine Commemoration Committee). 28 July 2005.

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